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MASOOD

"DEFERRED PAYMENT"—Page 55

*(From the original painting in the National Gallery,
Washington, D. C.)*

HIGH COMPANY

SKETCHES OF
COURAGE AND COMRADESHIP

BY
HARRY LEE

WITH A FRONTISPICE AFTER THE PAINTING BY
ORLANDO ROULAND



NEW YORK
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
PUBLISHERS



MASON

1871

1872

1873

HIGH COMPANY

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TO
WILLIAM H. MATTHEWS

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HIGH COMPANY

HIGH COMPANY

THE UPPER ROOM

SUCH bluster and blare of winds,
Such rattling of windows,
Such whistling over chimneys,
Such gusts of rain against the panes,
As though the night
Were a great sea in storm,
And the blown waves were breaking
Against some lonely lighthouse.

A lighthouse indeed tonight
Was this Upper Room,
Among its squirrel-haunted oaks,
For high above the street,
In a window looking toward the Hospital,
A beacon shone,
Long before the men from overseas
Came veering down that windy way,
Like unsteady craft
Bound for snug harbour.

The oak logs on the hearth
Were in great feckle,
When the sturdy knocking
Called the mistress to her door,
And the clump of the hobnails,
And the thud of the crutches
Sounded upon the stairs.

What a brusque tang of outdoors
They brought with them,
These children of the storm,
Flinging aside their wet coats,
Their jaunty caps,
Casting away crutches,
And hopping to the chairs
About the fire.

How they laughed about everything,
And nothing at all.
How they hailed each other
In the bluff kindliness
Of nicknames all too true.
Where was the sting
When Bill with the helpless hands
Called Tim with the cast
"Statue"—

Only to be answered with:
"Cut the kiddin', Cripple!"

But when the fags were lighted,
When Cavanagh's clay pipe fumed and fretted,
Sending up genial clouds,
When the big winds had gone
Blundering away over the trees,
When the coals lay deep and red,
And the flames were flickering
And the room was shadowy,
The mood of reminiscence came.

Overseas again—
Hiking in the snow,
Sleeping in the rain,
Squatting by camp-fires,
Lit by strange roads;
Boiling the pot,
Sharing the scant meal;
Throwing kisses to some maiden,
Smiling down between the parted shutters
Of a plastered gable,
Into the narrow cobbled street.

Unbragging tales of battle,

The bravery of the other fellow,
Always "the other fellow."
What Tom said the night he "got his."
The tenderness of a nurse,
The skill of a good doctor,
The princeliness of an officer.
Hating nothing but "yellowness,"
Fearing nothing but fear,
Greatly loving,
Champions of the helpless,
Laughers-down of smugness and sham,
Loud jesters,
Profane,
Reverent,
Wistful for home,
Longing for far places,
Brothers of the Rough Road,
Gypsies of God.

"Ah, Salvadore—
Don't be looking at your watch!"
"Ten-twenty—?"
"No—!"
"It sure is,
'Twill be taking all of ten minutes
To reach the Hospital

With this bunch of cripples!
Look at 'em—
Some soldiers,
I'll tell the world!"

From the Upper Room
I watched them toiling up the street.
The moon, through rifted clouds,
Made the way light.
The shadows of the branches
Lay black across the path.
They were singing.
I opened the window.
The young voices floated back,
Even after the pines hid them from view:

"It's a long, long trail a-winding
Into the land of my dreams,
Where the nightingales are singing,
And the white moon beams.
There's a long, long time of waiting
Until my dreams—"

THE PIPE AND THE FIRE

I CLOSED the window,
And turned to my chair by the fire.
Blink, blink,
Went the red eye of the last log,
About to retire for the night
Under its good grey blanket of ashes.
Puff, puff, drowsed the pipe.

Then, as though aroused
By some sudden memory,
The fire thrust a red tongue
At us both,
As if to say:
“Sleepy-heads!”
“Sleepy-heads indeed,” said I,
Replenishing both fire and pipe.
And thus encouraged,
My two friends gave me for my pains
Of their hoard of dreams.
What better repaying?

"Do you remember,"
Began the fire
In its cheeriest vein,
"The look in the eyes of John Knight,
When he sat propped in yonder bed,
That evening last week?"

"Ah—" said the pipe,
"But I was with him,
On the trip to the village
In his chair.
He was so blanketed, I heard him ask:
'Are we bound for the North Pole?'
He wore the overseas cap,
That Edder lent him.
'It's no harm—is it,
To look as if I'd got across,
To make folks think
That I've been—over?'"

"I watched the eyes of those we passed,
The sad,
The curious,
The understanding.
'Boys of their own somewhere,'
I thought.

"We went down by the lake,
And saw the West aflame with sunset.

John sighed:

'We used to sit on the kitchen steps

Evenings—

Mother and me,

Out home in Flat River, Missouri,

Many a time we did—

We have sunsets like that

Out there,

Only redder—'

"I was in my master's pocket,

Coming back,"

Continued the pipe,

"But I heard John say,

Eagerly as a little child:

'Sure, I could get up a flight o' steps!'

I heard the soldier they call 'Weiny'

Come whistling up the street.

They climbed the stairs,

Carrying the lad,

And propped him among the pillows,

On yonder bed."

The fire mused a bit,

And then burst forth:

"All true no doubt, good pipe,
But from your case you could not hear
What Mary the cook said:
'Fix suppah fo' dat boy—
Dat po' sick sojer-boy?
De good Lawd bless him!
Jes yo' wait—
Hot biscuit,
Jam,
Steak all juicy brown—!'

"Who but I heard the kitchen poker,
Prod, prod,
The kitchen grate,
Shake, shake.
My eyes it was saw John,
Sitting before the table,
In front of me—
If you please, Mr. Pipe,
I can't forget such things,
They keep my heart warm.

"Jack's mother sat before me too,
The day Jack died.
I never am awake but that I see
Her old young face,

And hear her sob:
'His heart just broke—
He couldn't stand the pain.
My son—my dear,
To think I slept last night.
I slept all night—
And thought that he was better.
Oh, my son—'

"There was the rainy Sunday, too,
When Saunders' wife and child
Were with him here.
They called the baby Polly.
'How tall she's grown,'
He'd say,
'To think that she can walk.
But you seem thin—
You've worked too hard.
When I get home again—
I'm lucky, girl,
Three fingers gone,
What's that—
When I get home,
We'll be some jolly bunch,
Hey, Polly—hey?' "

The fire crackled cozily,
As though it saw
The little home to be.

“And I remember well
Another day when—”

Here midnight chimed
From the tower beyond the town.
The log fell
And snuggled among the ashes,
The pipe went out,
The room was very still.
And the moon looked in
Between the stark branches
Of the trees.

ANGELINE

THAT Angeline
Should have been overlooked,
Among the hurrying throng
Of doctors and nurses,
Of patients and orderlies,
Is not strange.
So dark she is,
So meek,
So occupied with mop and suds,
So zealous that the ever-passing feet
Have spotless floors
To tread upon.

Her Gift
Might have gone unnoticed
But for the Boys.
The very mention of it
Embarrassed her.
She stood,
Twirling her apron,
Her head bowed,

Smiling,
With teeth a gleam,
Her great, soft, upturned eyes
Heavy with tears.

“Ho, it’s a lil thing
I’ze doin’,
Fo’ dem as done so much,
A mighty lil thing.
’Caze dey’s jes’ me an’ lil Sue,
Mah sistah’s chile,
Mah po’ sistah, wat died wid de flu.
So I sez to mase’f:
‘Looka hyah, Angeline,
Is yo’all gwine set back
Doin’ nuffin fo’ de Boys
Jes’ ’caze yo’ cain’t tek ’em
Out ridin’ in limmyzines,
Lak de rich folks?’

“An’ mase’f answer back
‘Corse yo’ ain’t!
Wat about dat passel o’ pullets,
Yo’ all done got?
Dey’s layin’ fit to kill, ain’t dey?

De good Lawd mek yo' stewa'd
O' dem pullets,
An' dem aigs too.'
Dat po sick chile
In room sebenty-fo' say dis mawnin':
'Angeline, dem aigs so fresh,
Yo' kin mos' hyah de hens cacklin'!

"A Sunday ah done mek
Chicken fry fo' de boy in sebenty-seben.
Eat!
Lan' sakes! eat lak a harves' han'.
It's mighty lil—
Wat's dat—'widow's mite'?
No, sah,
You'ze 'staken.
I'ze a maiden lady!"

So mellow was Angeline's laugh,
So full of good-will,
It must have quickened the heart
Of every "po' sick chile"
Along the dim corridor.
I looked back,
At the turning.

Again her industrious mop
Was plying,
Mop and suds,
Busily plying.

APRIL HEARTS

SHE saw him first,
Of a Sunday night,
At the turn of the lake-road.
She was with her girl friend,
He was alone.
Very tall,
Limping on a cane,
Overseas cap much tilted.

“Did you get the eyes of him, Mary?”
Said the girl friend,
“Blue as the violets in the rain,
An’ the laugh in them too?”
“And the tears—” says Mary.

At Benediction,
Just as the candles were lighted,
Who but himself should come in,
And take a seat at the end of a pew,
That the poor leg might have room
In the aisle.

It was the little Father,
Who met them in the street after
And made them acquainted.
“And are we goin’ the same road home?”
Says Tommy.

On the way there was no dearth of talk.
Before he had said good-night,
At the door of Mary’s home,
She knew about the Pal
Who “got his”—
She could almost see
The brown hill in Flanders
Where they laid him to rest,
And the rude cross
Tommy’s own hands had set
To mark the place.
’Twas of him Tommy had been thinking,
When they met by the lake.
She knew Tommy’s home too,
Wrecked by the drink,
His mother dead of a broken heart,
The little sister,
Who would be needing him.

Mary never will forget
The songs he sang,

Sitting by her in the moonlight,
On the little porch;
Nor his laugh,
Nor the jokes of him,
Just in time to save the tears.
Long after he had gone,
She sat at her upper window
In the still night thinking of him.
“’Tis the April heart he has,
Tommy—” she sighed,
Half smiling,
“The April heart—”

The great surgeon decided
That the unbending hip and knee
Need not be so.
There was to be a series of breakings,
So many degrees each day.

One evening
Mary heard him whistling,
Saw him coming up the steep yard to her door.
The impossible had been done,
The knee and the hip were supple again.
“Great man—the Captain,” says Tommy,
“I sure was in luck to bump into him.

When me spine is straightened now,
I'll be meself again—
Give us a tune, Mary.”

A great one for his fun, Mary's old man.
It was rapid fire indeed
When he and Tommy got spinning yarns.
“ ’Twas the year I come over—”
And “That reminds me—”
And “The year of the big wind my—”
And “Do you know the one about Paddy,
Wid the foive dollar gold-piece
And the pinny in his pocket,
And how he made the mistake o' puttin'
The foive on the plate at the church.
And when he stops for his dhrink,
He throws down the pinny.
The bar-tinder says, says he:
‘Pfwat's that, ye rogue?’
And says Paddy, seein' the blunder,
‘ ’Twas given to God,
To h— wid it—!’ ”
So with merry enough talk
The evenings passed.

Every day for as long as she could remember,
Mary had gone into the little Church

By the lake,
To pray.
And Tommy would be going with her.
There in that still place,
Kneeling together,
They seemed free from the dread
Of the passing of things,
And to know that they two
Were to be each other's for time
And for eternity—
So one day Mary leaned toward him
And whispered:
“Lend me a dime—Tommy.”

Noiselessly she went,
Past the stations of the Cross
Toward the altar,
Over which the red symbol
Of the spirit
Flickered.
She knelt before the shrine of the Mother
And lit a candle—
Outside among the windy trees,
There was the twittering of many birds.
Within the dim chapel,
The two were long in silent prayer.

Out in the sunny street again,
Said Mary:
"I'll be just a minute, Tommy,
I must be getting some bread
And a bit of tea."
So the lad, puffing his cigarette,
Waited till she came.
"I've changed the bill
And here's the dime I borrowed."
"Ho—never mind, Mary,
'Twas given to God,
To h—"
Quickly she stopped him.
"There, 'twill do—
That's far enough," she said.

"That job that's waiting for me
In Philly, Mary,
'Twill be a chance to sink a wad,
For the time coming—
I'm not drinkin', you know,
Any more,
And the gamblin' cut out."
Reaching deep into the khaki pocket,
"Here's the bones—

You can throw 'em away,
If you want, Mary."

Mary's eyes were twinkling.
"Faith, you throw one of them
One way,
And I'll throw one
The other—
Ye might be changin' your mind, later."

So passed the Hospital days.
Tommy had been before the Board,
Was to be discharged.
Two weeks—a week,
Tomorrow—he must go.
They were together again in the moonlight,
On the little porch of Mary's home.
They had been planning for the future.
There was a bit of a house
He had seen once,
When he went with the boys
To play ball.
It was in Overbrook,
Outside of Philly.

"'Tis a pretty name—Over—brook,"
Said Mary,
And all of a sudden she was sobbing forlornly,
"You'll be forgetting Mary—"

"Listen—
"Listen—Mary.
You know what it is I value most,
'Tis all I have to remember her by.
Not as the engagement ring,
I'll be bringing that—soon,
Mary—oh, very soon.
But just as a pledge.
She gave it to me—
The night I left for 'over there.'
'Tis yours now—Mary,
—me mother's ring."

THE HIDDEN WOUND

SHE had been traveling all day.
It was after eight when the train pulled in.
"Too late to go to the Hospital, Ma'am,"
The taxi-man said,
"Visitin' hours is two to four."
But she insisted.
"It's all the same to me, Ma'am."
And they were whirring
Through the village streets,
Up the hill,
Around the circling drive,
Under the covered porch.
She stood before the thousand-windowed house
Where her son was,

Through the wheezy turning-door,
Into the high entrance hall,
She hurried nervously,
Lugging her valise,
And the basket filled with good things
For him.

The young orderly
Spoke rather stammeringly.
She did not know
That at sight of her,
His own mother,
Grey,
Slim,
Wistful-eyed,
Out of his sight for long months,
Came before him.

“Robert—did you say—his name is?
Yes—at least I think—
Will you sit and wait
Just a moment,
Till I see—”

Robert's mother sat in a great chair,
Looking very small,
And far from home.
She saw through the glass partitions
A number of young soldiers,
Lolling here and there,
Smoking or reading.
Faint strains of music,
And occasional storms of hand-clapping

Came from the mess-hall,
Where a show was going on.

She gave her hair little womanish touches,
She straightened the black bonnet,
Smoothed all the fingers of the black gloves.
She must look her best for him.
How fortunate she was—
Great fellows came now and again
Through the turning-door,
Hobbling on crutches.
Once the doors beyond were thrust open,
And a soldier came in
Wheeling another.
How fortunate
That her son had escaped—
His body was as sound as when she saw him last,
And he had been through so much.
The account of his regiment,
At the Argonne—the glory,
Had not everyone read of it?
Just the slight trouble with his heart,
And that almost cured.

The orderly returned.
“Yes’m, he’s here—but the—”

He stammered,
"But the visiting hours
Are over for—today.
I—I wish you could see him tonight,
I'm sure if you come in the morning,
At nine—you can—
The rules, you know, are so—"

"He's not sick?"

"Oh, no, Ma'am—no. He's not in his room.
You see—the hospital is so big.
I—Could you write a note for him,
So he could know? I'd take—"
"I think—" his mother said,
"I'll come in the morning.
Don't say I'm here,
I meant to surprise him.
I'll come—tomorrow."

He helped her into the waiting car,
And said "Good-night."
He wanted to say,
"Good-night—mother."

When she had gone,
He hurried back to the room
Where he had left her son.

He was not lying on the iron bed now,
But was at the door,
Leaning against the iron bars,
Clutching them in shaking fingers.
The news that mother was out there
Had sobered him.

“You didn’t tell her, Buddy?
I knew you wouldn’t—I knew you wouldn’t,
You’re a good skate.
She would die!
You see old dad was killed
When he was drunk—
What did I say tonight—what did I do?
Suppose she’d come sooner,
And seen ’em bring me in,
God—!
You see—I’m not excusin’ myself,
Not huntin’ sympathy,
But folks that didn’t get across
That never lived it,
Don’t understand—they can’t.
The nights like years,
The rain and rain and rain,
The mud,
The snow,

Lonesome—no news from home,
And death to face,
And bloody, screamin' mangled things
All 'round you,
And dead things,
That were your laughin' pals
An hour before.
Oh God—
You'd drink to hide it all,
You'd drink to keep from goin' mad.

You didn't tell her?
You're all right, old man.
She wrote she was so thankful
That I got back
Without a wound—

Without a wound—drink,
It's in our family.
Dad killed—and Uncle Will.
She dreaded it for me.
You didn't let her know?
She'll never know—
So help me God,
She'll never see
—the hidden wound.”

TREES

McGOVERN of the old Sixty-ninth
Lay in a very white bed
On the topmost floor of the Hospital,
By a window,
Overlooking an ocean of pines,
That billowed away
Under the brightest of wintry skies.

They had trundled him there
Yesterday,
After the operation.
Coming out of the ether,
He babbled on about an old Frenchman
Who had stolen his leg.
“What use is me leg to the frog?
Me game one at that—
Ketch him, someone!
Where’s Finnegan?
Go get it, you—”

All that was yesterday.
Today,

'Tis McGovern himself.
Ruddy,
Tousled,
The rogue in the eyes of him,
His Buddies round about,
Butts lighted.
McGovern himself,
Daring McPadden to cut him out,
Or Shaughnessy,
Acknowledged a divil wid the ladies.
"Go to it, the both av yez—an' you, Dugan,
Whin I'm out o' this shell-hole
Tis the lot o' yez
Will be knocked funny-faced!"

But in the afternoon,
When all the lads,
Shaved and brushed and shined
To the queen's taste,
Went gallivanting,
Down into the hidden village
Under the pines,
Time hung heavy.
The clamped wound ached,
And McGovern's restless spirit
Went voyaging overseas

Box-carring across brown fields,
Footing it with the merry-men,
Fighting beside them.

Coming upon him thus,
The flood-gates of his speech were opened.
The listener was swept away
Into the strange, terrible, laughing hell,
Which had left McGovern
Broken but unconquered,
McGovern still—

Of one man in his "outfit,"
He spoke oftenest.
"He was sure game—"
He would say,
Flicking the ashes from his cigarette,
Turning to ease the pain.
"He wasn't used to roughin' it,
Y'know, like some o' the lads,
But he was wid 'em.
Common—always bid you the time,
Free wid his dough.
As long as *he* had it,
The *bunch* had it.
Mind Malvey sayin':

'W'en sumpin's doin',
He'll be first to shoulder a gun!

One night in a snowstorm,
We comes to a house.
A French woman lives there,
A widow wid a raft o' younguns.
He knocks,
She tells us 'come in'—
Gee, but de fire looks good!
She makes us supper,
Fries up some spuds,
And oofs,
And boils a pot o' coffee.
After settin' around the stove,
We sings some of our songs,
And she sings de Marseilles an' all.
We sleeps in de loft that night,
A ladder up to it,
Straw for beddin',
Snow blowin' in.
Next mornin' she cooks breakfast for us,
Didn't want to take no pay.
Lost her man—
Got knocked off at Verdun.
'Course we makes her take the money.

Do y'know—he couldn't get done
Talkin' about that widow bein' so kind,
Talkin' about the kids.
He was a great one for kids,
Used to tell us about his own.
Seemed to sorto' like everything,
And get sport outo' everything.
We sure was sore w'en they transferred him
To the Intelligence.
Never heard the Boches got him
Till we landed in the States.
He was a Soldier—I'll say.

What's that?
A poet—?
Yeah?—Go on!
Wrote a piece about trees,
Sure enough—?"
The sunset
Gilded the crests of the pines,
Stretching away beyond the high window
To the very heart of the West.
The boy was listening.

*"I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.*

*A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast.
A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray.
A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain,
Who intimately lives with rain.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree." **

There was silence.

The soldier's eyes were scanning

The shimmering tree-tops.

"Will you write it down for me?"

He said at last,

"He was me Friend—y'know."

* "Trees," by Joyce Kilmer.

BALDUR THE BRIGHT GOD

ALL the March day,
Baldy had been at it,
In his tiny golden house.
Swinging on his trapeze,
Hopping from perch to perch,
Halting a moment to dip his bill
Into the clear water
Or the seed,
Or to peck daintily at the cuttle-shell,
The nurse had placed for him.
Chirruping,
Preening,
Spreading his yellow wings,
Ruffling his topknot.
Glancing down every now and then
At his great yellow-haired master,
And bursting his little throat
With the very rapture
Of the message he had to tell.
His message was of Spring,
And love,

And memory,
And hope,
And the thousand things
That brave youth hears
When pain relents,
And there is time to dream.

All the March day,
Baldy's master,
Propped in the bed,
Which had been his dwelling-place
Since early Fall,
Had been reading letters.
Such a host of them,
They had not forgotten—
Folks he had almost forgotten himself.

To think of Lulu Nunnamaker remembering him!
Lulu, whose red braids
In front of him at school,
Had made tweaking irresistible.
Lulu had forgotten her tiffs,
And written,
Wishing him a "happy birthday."
Happy—
With home three hundred miles away,

And the moveless hips,
And the pain.

“Joy, joy, joy—oh, joy!”
Caroled Baldy,
His tiny head lifted
Toward the high white ceiling,
As though looking at the sky.
The boy turned almost deprecatingly
Toward his merry comrade:
“If I hadn’t named you ‘Baldur the Bright God’
I’d be angry at you, Baldy—
If you weren’t in a cage.”

But Baldur sang blissfully on,
When the doctor came,
With the usual:
“How do you feel today?”
And—“Yes, of course the diet
Will make you seem faint,
But it may help the trouble.”

He trilled rapturously,
When the aide brought the baking apparatus,
And the electric current
Went tingling through the helpless limbs.

When the orderly came,
With the stipend of food
At noon,
Baldy sang—
When he came to take away the tray,
Baldur's master asked him to close the door,
That he might revel in the messages
That each mail brought.

One from the teacher,
Who taught him nights,
That winter before he went to France.
After his days in the factory,
After her days in the school-room.
What a faithful of the faithful she was,
How like herself the letter sounded.

Well, well—
One from the postmaster back home.
One from Old Man Pease,
He had overlooked the watermelon scrape.
He was a square old guy, Pease—at that.
One from Deacon Pettigrew,
Inquiring about his spiritual welfare.
He means well—the deacon.
One from Sister Jennie's little John,

Hoping Uncle Paul will soon be home
To see his white rabbits,
“Mr. and Mrs. Carrot and their family.”
Some kid—Johnnie!

One from—
Surely it can't be—yes,
There's the postmark.
A.P.O., 713, France—
It is the first letter from Skarvedt,
Since they parted in Chaumont.
Lucky boy, Skar—still with the outfit.
Mother had forwarded the letter.
To think that it too should come
On the Birthday.

How the words of the boyish scrawl
Brought the good old Buddy back!
And Chaumont—
The Hospital on the hill,
And the grain ripening,
And the poppies,
One early evening when they stood together,
Watching the beauty of it all:
Saw the ramshackle two-wheeled cart,
Lumbering down the hill

After the laggard droop-necked horse.
The old man in his blue smock
And wooden shoes,
Trudging solemnly beside.
Grain turning yellow,
And the poppies blowing.

Yes, Baldur—your little brothers
Were there too,
Singing,
In spite of the ones
Who would not come back to Chaumont.

One more remembrance to be opened.
He had saved it for the last.
A package heavy, square,
From Mother—
Is it a book?
Mother knows how he loves books.
Hadn't she come often and often
To that room of his,
Where the pine-bough brushed the windows
On stormy nights,
To tell him it was time
To lay the book away
And get to bed.

How carefully it was wrapped,
Tissue after tissue.
Why it's a—
It's a cake.
That spicy, raisiny, dark kind,
His favorite,
All in a glistening coat of icing,
And candles,
Twenty tiny red candles.
"Nineteen for his years,
And one to grow on—"
Mother had written,
And—"with all love."

Baldy cocked his little crown
Wonderingly.
Why was his master's face
Hidden in his hands?
Why were those broad shoulders shaking?
Baldy forgot to sing.

Then there was a sound of light knocking
At the closed door—
They knew who,
Baldur and his master.
It was the Blue Bird.

For so they called
The one with the brown eyes,
The little lady in blue,
With the white cap and apron,
Who came every day with the basket
Of pretty coloured yarns
And beads,
And things to make you forget.
They had missed her all day,
And here she was,
Just as day was fading
To bring day back again.

She came swiftly
As bearers of joy should come,
Bringing jonquils—
“For I had not forgotten,”
She said,
“Your Birthday,
Nor that you said:
Of all the flowers
You loved jonquils the best.”

Oh, then the glisteny cake
Was set with all the candles;
Then the tiny lights burst forth.

Tomorrow,
She should cut the luscious thing,
Should have the first piece
And share the rest
With all the boys—

Himself?—Who cared for cake
When there were so many better things?
Who could think of fasts
In the midst of such a feast
Of friends and—

“Joy, joy, joy—oh, joy!”
Sang Baldur
From his little golden house.

WINGED HEELS

WHERE ought youth to be,
At high winter,
When the trees are crackling
Under flashing crystal,
When the sky is blue and bright,
When the lake is a sheet of polished steel,
Where should youth be then?

At the Soldiers' Hospital
The word passed,
As though Mercury himself were the messenger.
"The lake is frozen—
There'll be skating today!"
To the boys from the South,
It meant a new experience;
To the others it recalled
Days of peace,
Before they had known the Valley of Shadows.
Now they were back in the good land,
In "good old U.S.A."
Youth was still theirs,

The winter sun kindling the icy trees,
And the lake frozen.

So when the passes came due,
After mess,
All the lads who could call
Two good legs their own,
And hearts that could stand it,
And throats and what not,
Joined the gala company,
Which thronged the village streets.
Boys and girls,
Youths and maidens,
The young-hearted of greater years,
A glorious cavalcade.

Surely the lake had forgotten
Its October shadows,
The dripping oars,
The swan,
The summer birds.
Mailed,
Glittering,
It lay between the pines,
And the shivering oaks
And the thorn-trees,

Abandoned to the will of the revellers.

Gliding,

Whirling,

Waltzing,

The keen blades ringing,

Cutting frosty-edged figures

On its hard, glassy breast.

A riot of sound and colour:

Floating scarves of red and yellow,

Of blue and green,

Gorgeous caps and sweaters,

Flushed cheeks,

Laughing eyes,

Shouting and laughter.

Suddenly,

A wild jumble of arms and legs.

“Who’s down—

Did he see stars?”

Up and at it again,

Away—away

With the wind and the sun.

Now Louie Levasseur from Northern Maine

Cannot claim two good legs

Since Chateau-Thierry,

Neither can Tom Oleson from Minnesota;

But being Buddies,
And hearing the news,
They too had come
To the lake—
On their crutches,
To—watch the others.

Louie said:

“If I go out—I show them how
I win the prize last year,
In my home town.”

Tom laughed:

“Pretty lot you’d show ’em now!
The ice ain’t no place for old cripples
Like me and you—”

“Old—me—nineteen?

’Cause I got a year on you,
You call me old—eh?”

A girl in a red cap and sweater
Skipped by with a soldier.
As they passed the girl glanced up
Toward the bank where the two,
Crumpled down on their crutches,
Stood forlornly.

"Bet she takes us for a couple o' scarecrows,"

Said Louie,

"Scarecrows in the wind—"

"Let's go back to the Hospital,"

Tom answered weakly,

"It's cold—standin'."

NINETTE AND RINTINTIN

MACFARLAND of the Sixth Marines
Lay motionless,
Hectic,

In the small, weather-boarded room,
Partitioned from the glassed-in porch
Where the convalescents were.

Through the dark fringe of half-closed lids
He glimpsed dimly,
Swung from the frame of the open window,
The blowing figures of the woollen dolls,
Which his pal had sent
"To bring him luck."

Ninette—all pink, with stormy yellow hair,
Rintintin—blue, clumsy,
With black yarn cuffs and anklets,
And black bead-eyes.

In and out they swung in the April wind,
In and out,
In and out—

The doctor was standing by the bed.

"Tonight will be the crisis,"

MacFarland heard him say

To Miss Glorieux, the nurse.

The words were very faint.

Tonight will be the—

Tonight will be—

Tonight—

The doctor and the nurse were growing dimmer,

Dwindling—how small they were.

Now only as high as the bed.

"Miss Glorieux—!" he called.

From somewhere out in the night,

The answer seemed to float,

"Yes, MacFarland—I hear you,

But I can't come, I—"

The walls, too, were sinking,

Down, down—silently.

Now the stars were looking in,

The pines were bending and blowing

All about.

The white sheets were turning green

Like moss.

What was the sweet smell?

Flowers—he was lying among flowers.
All the forest things he loved,
Violets,
Anemones,
Trailing arbutus—

Then down the air from the windy pines
Two figures came clumping,
In wooden shoes.
No stairs,
And yet there was the click, click, click
Of small sabots.
A tiny man in blue,
A tiny lady in pink,
Laughing, chattering,
Came tripping down the unseen stairs
To the green bank where he lay
Among the blossoms.
The little man seemed strangely like the doctor,
Yet was not—
To the wee woman MacFarland spoke,
With much assurance:
“You are my good nurse Glorieux!”

At this the small folks laughed,
And the lady kissed him

On both cheeks.

"He doesn't know us!"

She cried incredulously,

Shaking her yellow hair about her face.

"He will," snapped the little man,

"He will soon if he doesn't now!"

And grasping the hands of the lady,

He began to whirl with her

At maddening speed.

Suddenly two black cords dropped,

At which both caught and clung.

Wriggling upward they shouted back:

"Good luck—good luck!

We came to bring you luck!"

"Stay—stay!" MacFarland called.

Miss Glorieux was at his side.

"You were dreaming—child," she said.

Then all was still again.

When at last he awoke,

It was early morning.

Such a fragrant, earthy morning.

Robins were chirping outside.

Down the glassed porch,

Beyond the weather-boarded room,

Someone was whistling

Lightly,
Tenderly,
The Spring Song.

“Good morning, Marine—”
The nurse was smiling down at him.
“You have won the battle,
The danger is past—
That last prescription did the work.”

MacFarland ran his long fingers
Through his tousled hair,
Lifted his eyes gratefully:
“It wasn’t the prescription,
Miss Glorieux—”
He glanced toward the window,
Where Ninette and Rintintin
Swung gaily in the wind.
“It was you,
You—that brought the luck.”

DEFERRED PAYMENT

FROM beyond the closed door
Come the light tripping notes
Of swift-picked strings.

In answer to your tapping,
An eager voice calls:
“Come—”

Masood sits upright
In a gaily blanketed chair,
Trim,
His khaki blouse buttoned and hooked.
It is ten months since he has walked,
But—a soldier must be soldierly.
“Welcome, friend—!”
As his dark, strong hand is thrust forward
To clasp your own,
You will note a faint jangling,
For about his wrist,
On a thong,
Hang a tiny key,
A medal,

And the numbered disc,
Called in soldier parlance,
The "dog-tag."
In the pocket over the heart
Is another medal,
With a star and a cross,
But he will not mention that.

"Once I go out in the mornings,
Like the young lion,
Go all day—
Swim in the river,
Row the boat,
What you call—wrestle,
Never make tired."

Before you notice all about,
The mute evidences of the struggle
To bear the burden blithely—
The red geraniums,
The flag,
The open book,
The scattered papers,
The half-finished silken bag,
The mandolin,
Even before you sense

The brown Syrian comeliness
Of starry eyes
And laughing mouth,
You will be dazzled by the vision
Of glorified helplessness.
You will be as one brought suddenly
From the curtained dullness of indoors
Into the blazing splendour
Of Oriental day.
You ask him to sing the "Camel-rider song."
"You want—?" in swift radiant consent,
"Sure, if you can stand—I sing."
Down goes the dark head,
The mandolin answers the supple fingers:
"Camello—ca-mel—lo—"
He drones in the passionate monotone
Of the Syrian music.
His faithful chair is the camel's back,
The grey floor of his room,
The desert—
He lurches and sways,
His eyes dreamy—half-closed.

Suddenly he pauses to explain:
"The camel-rider sit on high place,
Bags of coffee both side,

White silk wind around head,
Dress all in white,
Coming down Lebanon Mountain.
If I walk again—
If not—well—
But if I walk again,
I go once more there,
Sit under green tent on the roof,
Look down over the town,
Talk to my mother.

My mother—
When I try to speak about,
I am ashamed,
I must say God.
So thin my mother,
So small,
Eyes so shine—
Always think about the neighbor-woman.
Does she need flour,
Does she need cheese?
Then go and take.
When child born,
Carry water from the well
To that house—

The kind heart best,
The no-fear heart—
Like Captain Archie Roosevelt,
My Captain.
No fear he have,
Just love for the man,
Love for the liberty.
He come to see me
In hospital in Paris—
Make me take money.
The money go,
The good words stay.

I say to myself one day,
When pain too bad:
'It is better I be sleeping
With my brothers,
Under the little crosses
Over there—'
And I think:
'If I walk—
I wear always long beard,
And go where very sorrow is.'
I say to myself:
'What use—?'

Then I remember—
Night in trenches,
Shells fall all around,
Friends drop all side—
Shell burst—bury me in mud and snow.
Can't move long time,
Then crawl to stable—just walls.
I say to God:
'You make me—you take me.
If my time now—all right,
I make the fight.
The good soldier make the good fight,
He keep the smile.
So—I smile,
I—"

Out in the Hospital grounds
The squad is standing at attention,
The bugle sounds "retreat."
Slowly the flag is descending.
Masood's shoulders straighten,
His lips are firm.
He salutes—

"SOLDIERS THREE"

THE sparrows had always considered
The doings in and about
That old red house in Philadelphia
Their most vital subject for gossip,
Whether chatting on its chimney-tops,
Its mossy roofs,
Among the vines,
Or in the ancient elms before it.
The conduct of wind and weather,
The passing people,
The huckster calls,
The tunes of the hurdy-gurdy,
The gay trundling flower-carts,
Were secondary matters.
Mother away,
Son away,
Why—?

Why were the green shutters always closed?
Why did the smoke no longer rise
Blue and pleasant?

The lights in the windows,
Where were they?
And the blowing curtains,
And the song?

One thing only gave them hope,
That as before,
So all would be again.
Every evening
One of The Three,
Who had made the old house home,
Would climb the white steps,
Turn the key,
Go in,
And close the door.
That was the Father.
But where was Ed?
How he used to bound up those steps,
Storm the great door,
Slam it to,
Calling always first of all:
"Mother—
Where are you, Mother?"

Through the long days of absence,
Each tiny heart

Echoed that boyish call.
Where had she gone,
Ed's slim young mother,
In the dove-grey dress
And the white kerchief?
What happy eyes she had,
And she was gone—

"I think I know,"
An old bird said one day,
Flirting his coat-tails sagely,
"I think I know where Ed has gone."
The word was passed,
And soon he was the centre of a group,
Still-winged,
Respectful,
Listening,
Among the branches,
High above the street.

Faint,
But growing clearer,
Nearer,
Clearer—
Horns,
The crash of cymbals,

Drums,
And timing feet.
The littlest sparrow even
Felt his heart beat fast.

"Look down,—"
The old bird whispered.
Every head veered earthward,
Every eye was bent upon the street.
Hale,
Young,
Strong-limbed,
The Soldiers passed.

"Now do I need to say,"
The wise one asked,
"Where Ed has gone?
As they are—so was he,
That brown—like ours—he wore
The day he went away."

A moment there was stillness,
Then a fledgeling chirped:
"Yes, Ed has gone to war,
But she—Ed's Mother,
Where is she—?"

There was much fluttering of wings,
And all the voices echoed:

"Where is she?"

A mother-bird now ventured:

"Why not send flyers out,
And let them ask at every tree
For news of her.

Surely somewhere in earth or sky,
They'll find someone who's seen her."

The old bird nodded—"Good!

Now, volunteers!" he cried.

But such a babel rose

That it was put to vote,

And two were chosen,

Known to be the fleetest of the tribe.

So eager were they that they would not wait,

But spread their wings and flew away,

Out and up,

Into the blue night

Where the stars were shining.

And many a night,

And many a long day passed.

The sparrows almost feared

Their messengers were lost.

Indeed they offered little twittering prayers

To the sun for their return,
And were in the midst of devotions
When right out of the sunrise
The heralds came—
"We have found her, we have found her!"
They were singing as they flew.

A great whirring of wings,
Then all was breathlessness
Among the leaves.
"We stopped at every nest and every tree,
And hope was almost gone,
When we met one 'Flutter-wing,'
Who said that he had seen
A lady like our lady,
Dressed in grey.

'She was by a lake,' he said,
A fire was lighted,
And over it a steaming gipsy-pot,
And there were yellow trees
And red,
That bent above the water.
And all about were soldier-boys.
Some sitting by their crutches,
Some strolling in the shade,

Some helping spread the good things
On the grass,
And when the things were ready,
How they ate!
'Some chow—I'll tell the world!'
'Are there such things as "slum,"
'Corn-willy,' 'hard-tack'?'
'Gad—what pie!'
'Mother baked an apple-pie
Twelve inches round and—'
'Did you bake this pie, Mother?'
And she—was Mother to them all.

And Flutter-wing said to us:
'If you fly along this road,
And through a wood,
And over a wide lake,
And past a town,
You'll find a place where many soldiers are
And where she is.
And just at dusk,
When all the lamps were lit,
We found the place.

A Hospital they call it.
We hopped along the window-sill,

And sure enough,
Ed's Mother—by a bed,
Sewing a button on a soldier's coat,
And all about her there were boys
In bed,
Propped among pillows.
The phonograph was going,
Lads singing with it—
'Katy, my beautiful Katy,
You are the only girl that I adore,
When the m-moon is shining
O'er the cow-shed,
I'll be waiting
At the k-k-kitchen door—'

Ed's mother went from bed to bed.
'Mother, will you mail this for me?'
'Thanks for the flowers—Mother.'
And when she went,
They called: 'Please come back soon.'

We flew along the wall,
And saw her go upstairs
And stop beside a bed.
The soldier's face was much too white,
His eyes were closed,

But when she came,
He smiled—such a faint sick smile.
'You're like she was—' he whispered.
And we knew—we knew she was our lady.

We've traveled all the night,
And here we are—and hungry.
What's to eat?"

So all the day there was High Carnival,
Among the elms that guard the old red house.
The Father, coming home at dusk,
Stood smiling, looking upward, on the steps,

"The sparrows too must know the news.
The transport—homeward bound,
With Soldier-Son aboard,
And Soldier-Mother coming too,
Home will be Home again,
Thank God—"

BIDDLE'S KID

OLD Man Biddle sat by the open window
In the Hospital workshop,
The warm wind ruffling his sparse hair.
He was putting the finishing touches
On the toy—the wooden donkey,
That was to be the Kid's birthday gift.

While Biddle's tremulous hands
Laid on the gay colour,
While his hollow eyes scanned the work,
His thoughts were back in 1916,
In Bennington.
The little house there,
Evenings—home from work,
The table set for three.
The smell of the yellow flowering cloves,
Blowing in from the dark.
Why should that fragrance be always
A part of the thought of home?
There were other pleasant nights,
When all was deep in snow.

Times when the winds were loud,
And the rain against the windows.
And to think of it all gone—forever.
The wife sleeping on the dim hill above the town,
Timmie in the Orphans' Home.
All in two years—

When Old Man Biddle did talk,
If that half-whispered croak of his
Could be called talking,
It was of Timmie—
“Kid's eleven most,
Small for his age—but smart,
Like a whip.
Can't walk just right since he fell,
Has to use crutches—now,
Be all right afterwhile—
When I get out o' this man's army,
I'm gon' to set up home fer him and me.
Won't be the same, but—”

How patient the other boys were,
At work in the shop,
With Biddle's ramblings.
Bigwood at his mimic tanks,
MacNeale with his aeroplanes,

Placier with the leather.
They too have learned in the Hard School
What infinite things
Are home and love—
(Do not attempt to tell them this
However about themselves,
They would probably "bawl you out,"
Or tell you to "cut the sob-stuff.")
So Biddle rambles on and on.
And they are kind.

Biddle's Ward-Surgeon
Is what the boys call "a prince,"
"A reg'lar guy,"
"White clean through,"
"He'll set down an' talk wid the fellers,
Like me an' you—
But you can't get away wid nothin'.
Knows the high-brow business too,
Don't you forget it—
Kind of a man you'd go through hell fer."
Being a great physician,
And a great human too,
The affairs of each soldier under his care
Mean much to him.

Then the doctor got a letter,
A very amazing one.
It came from two old ladies in Connecticut,
Friends of his mother.
Among other things,
They wanted a soldier to come to them
For a visit.

When it was proposed to Biddle,
Three days pass—not longer,
On account of the dressings,
He said:
“Thanks, Captain, but it wouldn’t more’n take me
To where the kid’s at,
And there’s no place else to go.”
Then the doctor explained,
How he used to go as a boy
To these very old ladies’ home.
How disappointed they would be.
“Ho, they’d be wantin’ one o’ the young chaps,
Not a wore-out, gassed old contrapshun
Like me.”
But the Captain won as was his way.
“I’ll send the donkey to the Kid.
Might slip in something else—for the birthday.
Write the address for me—what’s this?”

On a bit of gilt cardboard
Biddle had printed:
"Timmie from Dad—
When we set up home,
You can ride there on him."

So four days later,
Stepping from the train in South Norwalk,
Biddle was met by a pleasant old lady,
Who whisked him into an old-time phaeton,
Switched the lines,
Clucked to the little bay mare,
And drove off
At an astonishing pace,
Up hill, down dale.
Biddle had scarcely time to say,
How Timmie loved the country,
How smart he was—
Like a whip,
Though small for his age,
Not walkin' just right yet—
When the old lady pulled up
At the door of a white farm-house,
From whose tall chimney
Smoke was pouring out cheerily,

As from the home fires
In Bennington, back in 1916.

Then the door opened,
And another old lady,
Absurdly like the first,
Came out,
Calling—"Welcome!"

And from somewhere upstairs
Sounded the click of little crutches,
Across the bare kitchen floor,
To the edge of the porch,
Into his father's arms,
Kissing him again and again,
Fairly strangling him
In his tiny arms.

"Oh, Daddie, Daddie—you've come!
They want us bofe—they do.
Your doctor—your good doctor fixed it all,
Aunt Mary and Aunt Jennie too!
They want a little boy—

See, Daddie—see,
The wooden donkey 'at you sent!
I won't need to ride him home,
'Cause home's set up
For us two, Daddie—
Here is—Home!"

THE GOOD BROWN EARTH

THE Hospital grounds are radiant,
Though April has cast but the faintest green
Over the shrubbery,
And only a few days ago,
The borders were brown and barren.
The dark pines keep perpetual watch
About the towering white pole
Of the flag,
Which lives with the winds
Far above the highest tower.
The grass is putting on brighter emerald.
All along the drives and walks,
That wind like grey canals
Through the level stretch of the lawns,
Tulips blaze—
Tulips by the myriad,
Golden tulips splashed with crimson,
Like chalices overflowing with wine.
Each lifted cup a symbol
Of some young Soldier life.

Tulips—tulips,
And in and out among them,
The old gardener Van Tassel,
In earthy blue overalls and blouse,
Always ready to bare his bald head,
And stand at exaggerated attention,
At the passing of an officer
Or a nurse.

No one of all the lads
Who gazed from high windows
Down at the miniature Holland,
Or limped by with:
“Gee—some swell sight!”
“How did it get that way?”
“Rainbow Division—eh?”
Or bursting into song:
“When you wore a tulip,
A bright yellow tulip—”
For song comes easily in Spring—
No one of all the lads
Knows whence this riot of glory came.

Van Tassel, the gardener, knows,
But would not say.
He has often told his good wife,

► And will tell her many a time again
Of an evening,
Between puffs of his pipe,
How the stern C. O.
Had called even him—Van Tassel
Into the inner room,
And read a letter to him
With anything but a stern voice;
And sent him to the great house
With the drawn blinds,
In answer to the written words.

“She was sitting by a fire,
The old sweet mother—?”
Van Tassel’s wife would ask
For the hundredth time,
Pouring him another cup of coffee.
“Sitting before the fire,
And dressed in black—you said?
And over the mantel,
A painting of a young man
In regimentals,
A young man with blue eyes,
And much bright hair,
And on his breast in silver,
Spread wings—?”

The old gardener,
Cheered by the friendly warmth
Of his homely kitchen,
The hot cup,
The pipe,
The good wife's words,
Would rub a rough hand over his shiny crown
And say—
“She called him ‘My flying Boy.’
‘He will not come home again.
Here is the place they—’
It was a bare hillside—just brown earth,
And a cross—
‘He loved the earth’—she said,
‘And flowers,
Every Spring we used to tramp together
Through the woods—
Is the arbutus blooming—do you know?
I have not gone this year.
I thought about his hill—it is so bare,
So bare and brown, and oh, so far away.

All boys love Spring and flowers.
May I send flowers to the Hospital?
Tulips now, and pansies—by and by.
The other boys will see—

My life is like his hill.
But thoughts of him—you know,
And it is Spring—' ”

All the town goes by the Hospital
To see the tulips bloom,
Bright gold and crimson
In the April weather.

THE ROLL OF HONOUR

MRS. O'TOOLE was waving the yellow paper
From her fourth floor window,
Beckoning with it frantically,
As Molly Dugan came down Forty-sixth
At the noon hour,
From the box factory.

"He's not dead at all, at all—!"
Molly heard as she plunged into the hall,
Up the rickety steps,
Flight after musty flight,
Into Mother O'Toole's presence,
Who by this was swaying
Back and forth
In the green upholstered rocker,
Among the cluttered treasure
Of her parlour,
Facing the enlarged picture
Of the boy himself,
Her telegram twisted in hands
Red and crinkled from everlasting suds.

"The Saints be praised,
'Tis aloive he is—
And masses said—and all,
He's aloive—!"

Now sixty-odd lads went forth
From this especial corner
Of little old New York:
This supposedly unregenerate Nazareth,
From which no good can come.
Sixty-odd lads who marched away singing:
"Over there—over there,
Send the wor-rd, send the wor-rd over there,
That the Yanks are coming,
The Yanks are coming,
And we won't come back till it's over,
Over there—"
And after the months,
When the black-bordered Roll of Honour
Appeared in the papers,
"Hell's Kitchen" had its quota—and more.
So Molly Dugan, breathless from the climb,
Wondered which, and might have known
"Twould be Bill Keefe—
Mothered by Mrs. O'Toole,
Since the death of his own mother.

"Oh the grand b'y he was—
Oi moind well the day o' his first Communion,
He had a little blue suit that—
Yes, Molly dearie—here is the paper
From the Hospital—in Jarsey,
Wheriver that be.
'Arrived safe—feelin' foine,'
It sez, it does,
Oh—God be praised! Oho!"

Molly asked her forelady at the box factory
For a day off—to visit Bill Keefe.
Asked and got permission.
The forelady, by the way,
Wore a gold star.
"I live alone now, Molly," she said,
"Took a room in Forty-eighth,
Gave up the flat—
Too much work, just for yourself.
Getting old—you see.
Give Bill my love.
He and my Tom were pals,
You mind—how they were?"

So the next morning early,
Molly was up and away for the ferry,

At West Twenty-third,
All in her poor little finery.
High heels,
Droopy, slim, velvet clothes,
Long, clattering necklace of beads,
Tiny red cap, coquettishly tipped,
Black hair bulging over little ears,
Just a bit of powder on the nose,
A touch of rouge high on the cheeks:
You get so white workin' inside.
And the grey eyes,
That made one forget all else of Molly,
So ready to laugh or cry they were,
So eager to love,
So sure to know love's pain.
It was all so new to her,
On a week-day—too,
To be sailing away,
Like the swells,
Leaving New York behind.

She stood at the prow of the boat,
In the wind that was making free with the river,
And the sun that was glinting
On the shifting edges of a million little waves.
Past docks and factories,

Where thousands of other girls were working.
Past the towers of down-town,
Mysterious,
Forbidding,
But "grand"—oh, so very, very "grand,"
Into the dim Jersey station,
Out through the smoky yards,
Into a place of little houses.
Through Bayonne,
With water stretching both sides,
As though one were skimming over the surface,
Into a land of wide fields,
And trees,
And sky—
All flashing by, like a movie,
With the ringing of bells,
Blast of whistles.

Then—
A clean still village among green woods,
And somewhere, not far off,
Old Bill Keefe—
"Safe—and feelin' foine."

The Hospital orderly led her
Along the corridor, past many wards,

Opened a door and left her,
In a dim, high room.
Under its half-drawn blind,
Through the open window,
She saw a sunny porch,
Glassed,
Lined with beds.
Someone played a mouth-organ
Out there,
And two bed-ridden youths
Carried on a sham duel
With canes.

In the instant she sensed it all.
And then she saw the gaunt, deep-shadowed face,
The closed eyes,
The listless, big-veined hands
Across the breast;
The sheet-covered arch,
Like the top of a gipsy wagon,
Over the legs—

Could this be Bill?

Old roustabout, freckled, red-head Bill Keefe,
The "Rusty" of the old days.

Loud-voiced,
Swaggering,
Pitcher for St. Columba's team.
Claimed to be the handiest man with the mits
On the West Side—
Driver of the toppling yellow truck,
Cussin' folks out of his way,
Honk-honking down the tangled streets.
Idol of all the kids on the block,
And the old women,
And the young ones too, for that.
Could this be Bill—
Come wandering back—like a ghost,
To them all—?

Sudden pain distorted his face.
He awoke—raised his head,
Saw her standing there.
“Well, for Gawd's sake—!”
He cried—and the voice was his voice.
Noyd, the Swedish boy,
Thinking something had gone wrong,
Popped his head under the blind,
And seeing things anything but wrong,
Disappeared again
More swiftly than he had come.

“For the love o’ Mike—Moll,
How long was you standin’ there?
Why didn’t you belt me one?
How’s all the bunch—?
Mom—how’s she?
And Pete Kennedy’s kid—little Kate?
She was a swell kid—grewed, I bet.
And is many o’ the old crowd back?
Tom Callahan—y’know his old lady.
Fore-lady at the box factory yet—ain’t she?
He got his same night I got mine.
Never heard since we was at the dressin’ station.
No—so he cashed in?
He was a good scout, Tom—God rest him!”

“Tom’s name was on the Honour Roll.
We found it the same evenin’
We found yours—Bill.”

“Me—on the Honour Roll?
Me—?
Not all Jerry’s ‘flyin’-pigs’
And ‘whiz-bangs’
Could down this Irishman.
All that worries me is the nurse—”
(Said for the benefit of a smiling woman,

In spotless white,
Who had just paused at the door,
To see that all was well)—
“The nurse pesters me day and night
To keep me feet covered.
What’s the use o’ havin’ feet,
If yez can’t stick them out
At the foot o’ the bed?
I’d oughta had me two hands shot up
Instead—
Reach us the butts, Molly,
That’s a good girl—a match.
Foine—”

The blue clouds rose,
Incense to the familiar gods.

“And how is the little old town?
Is the subway finished—
And what are they diggin’ up now?
Do yez ever see me old yellow thruck?
Gad, wouldn’t I loike to be scorchin’
Across Brooklyn Bridge,
Wid the floor rattlin’ undher me!
Shure—I’ll be back before long.
D’ye moind old man Regan—?”

Yez couldn't a-told
To see him walk,
That his off-leg was a bit o' a tree.
They do great things,
Nowadays—
What—ye must go on the three-forty-foive?
We've hardly had toime
To blow the foam off—
I'll be lookin' for the both of yez
Soon—Mother O'Toole and—yerself.”

She looked so like the little Irish rose,
That indeed she was,
All ready to flutter away
In the wind, taking summer with her,
That a something very Irish too
Surged up in the brave heart
Of Private William Keefe,
Of the Twenty-Seventh,
And made him catch the slim hands
Of Molly Dugan,
And hold them fast—

“I'll not be contint,
Till me name is on the Honour-Roll—”
He sighed.

"What talk ye have—!"

"The name of William Joseph Keefe
And Mary Dugan—
Framed and hangin' on the wall.
'Tis two people only
Can get it there—
Father Dooley—and
Yerself—
Won't yez be usin' yer influence
For a crippled soldier-boy—?"

"Ye bold man—!" laughed Molly,
Trying to loose the hands,
And glad to fail—
"Ye'll be makin' me miss the thrain!"

"But will yez—Moll?"

"Faith—'tis no promise I'll be makin'!"
Noyd, the Swedish boy,
Popped his friendly head under the blind again,
And retired more precipitately
Than before.

PUDGYFIST VISITS THE HOSPITAL

THE morning dressings were finished.
The four long rows of beds,
Whether occupied or not,
Were immaculate.
Those whose "stitches" permitted,
Had gone in wheel-chairs,
Exploring the library,
The canteen,
The work-shops.
Of the others,
Some sat upright in bed,
Reading,
Writing letters;
Some lay quite still under the white covers,
Listening to the phonograph,
Playing for the thousandth time
The latest Broadway rag;
Or to the canary
In almost delirious rivalry.

Rivalry with April too,
Wild, youth-loving April,

Whose winds, through the open windows,
Were flooding the ward
With such twitterings and chirpings,
Such breaths of pine,
And of the sea,
Such shifting amber lights,
Such promises of awakenings,
And re-unions,
And stones rolled away—

Luigi,
Propped among pillows,
Was knotting a blue and white mat.
He was well recovered from his seventh operation.
Tomorrow the next—a bone-graft
Was to be made.

In the next bed,
Sergeant Jimmy Daigen,
Veteran of many hospitals overseas,
Was enlarging on the virtues
Of the ward-surgeon.
“D’ye know, I never enjoyed an operation
Like I did me last one—
You’d ought o’ heard me
Kiddin’ wid de nurses,

And wid him too.

'You're all right, Jimmie—' he'd say,

'You're sure game!'—

You mind how he come in de ward

Last evenin'—

Asks me have I an orange.

(Seen the visitors bring me a bagful)

Sets down—he does,

Peels one,

Picks up de funny paper,

Reads 'Mutt an' Jeff'—

Sez: 'Well, how's all you fellers tonight?

Bully?—sure yez are!'

A man like him

Gives a guy confidence—heh."

"I'll say so," Luigi agreed,

Laying down the blue and white mat

To light a cigarette,

Giving his black hair

A quick backward toss,

Smiling through a cloud of smoke

At Jimmie—and sighing:

"All time I tink about

No letter come—

Wife sick or what—can't tell."

An orderly came into the ward
With the word:
“A lady—to see Private Luigi Carboni.”
Luigi’s face is pale,
Wan from much suffering,
His hands tremble:
“If lady—then my wife Rosa!
If Rosa—then my baby Tony,
I never see yet!
One year old now—him,
My heart go up and down,
I—”

At the door of the wide ward,
Her great eyes scanning bed after bed,
Rosa stood—
All in black, with a red rose,
Her lips very tense.
Tony,
Just frilly bonnet,
And lacy skirts,
And little pink booties,
Asleep in her arms.

Then Luigi called—
The two were caught stormily
In his arms.

Brae put another record on the phonograph.
Everyone seemed to be talking to someone else,
Or to be lost behind a magazine or a book.
The nurse suddenly recalled some work
To be done in the kitchen,
And disappeared.
The yellow bird set up a gay song,
The burden of which was,
That he had known it all the time.

And when everyone came to himself again,
Tony's bonnet was off—
In pudgy doddering state
He bestrode his father's neck,
The black mane clutched
In his sturdy fists,
His expression quite bland
And non-committal.
His remarks,
Consisting of a series of gurgling
"Gooes" and "Ah-gooes,"
Addressed to the ward in general.
All the eyes
Up and down the long rows
Were fixed on the three,
In admiring and reminiscent approval.

"That's sure some swell kid,"
Jimmy Daigen said
Admiringly,
"Is he skairt o' strangers?"

Tony was not,
And accepted Jimmy's hospitality
As his desert,
With becoming dignity.
Playing with the tags about his neck,
Liking their jingle,
Not allowing himself to be over-elated;
And swinging across
To the outstretched arms
In the next bed,
Where a newspaper gave interesting opportunity
For crumpling,
And tearing—

Then came Stager the cow-puncher,
In his bath-robe,
To "tote" Tony down the line:
A gauntlet of snapping fingers,
Whistlings,
Dandled bead necklaces,
Proffered oranges,

And red apples,
To the canary's cage,
And the aquarium,
Where the gaping goldfish
Swayed through the pale green water,
The sunlight making their red and gold sides
Very brilliant indeed,
And arousing in Tony
The desire to have and to hold.
Failing in which,
He raised his voice
In a shrill and prolonged:
"Wa-a-a-a—ah—!"

Mamma Rosa turned
From the long contemplation
Of her husband's face,
As though his bed were a shrine,
And he some beautiful saint
To be adored.
"Tony hongry—come to Mamma,
Mio amore—
He want sleep—up five o'clock."
So Tony was fed and coddled,
And laid on the bed next father's,
Covered with a bright knitted coverlet,

Where his rosy repose
Was gloated over
By khakidom generally.

After the lunch-tray was brought,
And Mamma Rosa had opened her bag,
And added her tribute
Of fruit and red wine,
There was much pleasant talk
Of old times—
And wistful planning for days to come,
Till Tony yawned,
Kicked his pink toes,
And was carried off by Stager
To the ward across the hall,
Where Jones who likes kids,
Lay abed—
Jolly red-faced Jones.

What a picture he was,
Picking his ukelele for Tony,
Who snuggled familiarly in the curve of his arm.
What delightful discord,
Tony made now and again,
Dabbing an aimless fist
Upon the strings,

All the while eyeing the gathering crowd,
With restrained interest.

“Come on in, fellers—
Mother and child doin’ fine!”
Called Welsh.

Such a hoarse chorus of kindly mirth arose
That “Mother Jones,” shaken with laughter,
Forgot the aching wound,
Forgot even Tony,
Who toppled forward,
Bumping his stubby nose against the instrument.
Only to be restored by his protector,
More sedate and composed than before.

“What you boys do with my baby?”
Rosa laughed,
Elbowing her way through the crowd,
“You very kind—Tony, he have gooda time.
He be soldier some day,
When he bigga man—Luigi say so.
New York train come too soon!”
And taking Tony in her arms,
She hurried out.

Several of Tony’s friends came later
To the door of Luigi’s ward.

They saw just pink toes.
The rest of the baby was deep in his father's arms,
His father's dark head bent low over him,
The mother gazing at the two
Adoringly—

“Does she know about the operation tomorrow?”
Jimmy Daigen murmured, after they had gone.
“Know about—?” Luigi answered,
“Know about?
Not on your life!
One have pain—enough,
Why two—?”

LIGHTS OUT

TATTOO is sounding—
Ra-ta-too—ra-ta-too.
Silver clear through the darkness
The bugle calls.
Then faint and far-off the echo,
Like a memory,
Ra-ta-too—ra-ta-too.

You start at the sound.
Your thoughts had taken far wings,
And here you are again
On the long glassed porch,
In the bed with the overhead frame,
And the weights,
To straighten twisted limbs.
The other beds are empty,
All but Kelling's,
But Kelling is asleep.
Kelling always seems to sleep.
The other fellows have gone
On wheels or sticks
To the movies in the mess-hall.

You have been absent in thought
Ever since the row of round yellow lights
Burst suddenly forth

Like so many portholes
Along the black hull of the night.
You have been living over old days,
Old faces—old places
All about you—

A farm-house in Ohio,
The road from the village is very steep,
The grassy brick path winds under the pines
To the little porch,
Whose door opens to the sitting-room.
You peer through the window,
And see them all there.
Mother and sister—knitting,
Father reading the County paper.
Little brother,
With many protrusions of the tongue
At the crosses and curlicues and dots,
And frequent wettings of the pencil's
Ill-sharpened point,
Writing to big Brother,
Big Sojer-Brother,

With the gold stripes on each arm
And the limp.
How fine to walk down the street
With big brother,
With all the kids wishing
He was their big brother.

And there will be a certain
Soft, red-covered couch in the corner
Where you used to lie with old Tige.
Old Tige—who waits all day and every day,
So mother wrote,
For his master's return,
Watching down the steep road
Where he saw you go that May-day—
You had to scold him back,
Poor Tige—

How brave Mother was that day.
She smiled,
And you kept gulping down
The lump that would rise in your throat.
She smiled—
But her face was very white.
Has she aged, you wonder,
Is her hair any greyer now?

Father kept telling over his old Lincoln joke,
About the very little man in the very big coat,
And Lincoln chuckling to himself:

“Such a small nubbin for such a big shuck!”

“—Great man, Lincoln,
Great man—!”

How Father rambled on about Lincoln that day!

And little sister—

How she kissed you,

And promised to write,

And said she was going to know

More than “Chopsticks” on the piano

When you came back.

They will be thinking of you tonight

In that old house in Ohio.

They will be—

Then clear and sudden from the darkness

Tat-too—

And the yellow lamps out there,

And the wind blowing,

And the rows of white beds about you.

Kelling has roused too,

And is leaning on his elbow,

Muttering—

(Kelling, who never got overseas.)

“Another visitor asked me today:

‘In what engagement were you wounded,

Poor boy—?’

I told her:

‘In the Battle of Camp Upton.’ ”

It is Kelling’s sensitive point,

They are always asking him that.

“And when they find I wasn’t over,

I see their faces change.

I couldn’t help it —

I wanted to go.

Eight months in hospitals

Is no cinch—!”

Graham comes hopping in now,

And Conway with the bandaged arm.

Graham is unhooking Conway’s blouse.

“Stand still—you!” he growls,

“You’re more trouble to me

Than the day you was born!”

Then there is the endless length

Of leggings to unwind—

You wonder why the muffled laughter,

In the row behind you,

That heavy thing will not let you turn.
The nurse comes,
Bringing a wine-glass of yellow bitterness.
You have little faith in it,
But much in her.
You would take it,
If it killed you, you think.

Shuffling feet,
The screech of a wheel,
Tap of canes,
Much half-whispered talk.
The movies must be over.

Now you know the cause of the laughter
In the row back of you.
Marzyk—who is to be repaid
For numberless practical jokes,
Has found instead of smooth white sheets,
A bumpy rack of a bunk.
All the contents of the bags,
Which hang at the head of his bed
And Jacques' bed—
(Marzyk and Jacques—those confederates)
Have been jumbled,
Hit or miss between the two.

There are knots to untie,
Blankets to unwind—

The mock anger of the victims
Is met with first a “bark” from someone,
Down at the end of the line,
Then comes a prolonged “mieuw,”
“Quack-quack,”
“Cockledoodledoo—”

The night-nurse comes hurriedly,
With expostulating hands.
The O.D.,
Hearing the barnyard revel from his office,
Appears—
He sees three rows of beds,
All occupied with quiet heavy-breathing youths.
Among the bringers of Peace,
Peace reigns.

You chuckle to yourself.
The moon now rivals the yellow lights.
Before you, shimmery in the moonshine,
The goldfish
Go solemnly circling their glassy world.
The looms by the window,

So busy all day,
Look ghostly and deserted,
As though work were stopped forever.
Your hale comrades lie
In the poignant abandon of sleep,
Pain seems to have truce.

One of them murmurs:
"It's seven kilometers, I tell you,
You go through a woods—
It's on a hill—he's buried on a—"
Then there is silence.

Your thoughts go back again
To that old house in Ohio.
The sitting-room will be dark now,
The clock ticking away unheard.
They will all be asleep,
Father,
Sister,
Little brother,
Mother—
Will she be—sleeping?

THE PIE LADY

MANY a lady has come visiting the Hospital
Since first it opened its doors
To the good lads.

Ladies in limousines,
Ladies afoot,
Gushing ladies,
Garrulous ladies,
Ladies slim, ladies stout,
Ladies short and tall,
Young ladies,
And others not so young.
Good ladies all,
And—the Pie Lady.

The Pie Lady is not so young,
And she is stout,
And neither tall nor short.
Her eyes through thick glasses
Seem preternaturally small,
And blue,
And twinkling.

In each ear a white stone sparkles,
As though well content
With the pleasant things
Their mistress hears on all sides,
And with the mothering words she says.
About the steep slopes
Of her inverted basket hat
Purple pansies bloom.
When she speaks there is a curious little
Hold-up of words.
So many,
Rushing pell-mell to be said,
They trip each other's toes
In the saying.
And her arms—
Surely no other two arms
Could hold such delectable mountains
Of brown-crust, quivery-topped gooeyness.
Oh, boy—

And dependable—
The sun is not more so,
Nor the nurse with the "Daken"
To pump into your tubed wounds,
Nor the "misery-wagon" for the dressings,
Nor the bitter draughts.

The Pie Lady is as sure,
And so much more welcome.
If it rains,
Her umbrella is an ark.
If it snows,
Her cloak is shelter.
When she comes from the village Clifton-way,
All the boys in the West wing know it,
The good word is passed.
If she travels Lexington-way,
Ward D and Ward B shove windows up,
Whatever the weather,
To hail her.

And when she enters,
It's not just Pie
But Home that comes—
Visions of other mothers,
In remembered kitchens,
Of cakes being stirred in yellow bowls,
Of eggs dizzily beaten,
Of oven doors opening,
Letting out agreeable spicy odours
And clicking shut again.

“No pie for you today, boy!”
To Wasson in his cast,

Hale, cheery old Wasson,
Who must either stand erect
Like a wooden Indian,
Or lie flat.

"Sorry, boy, no pie—doctor says not!"

All the while slyly winking
Through the spectacles
At the rest,

Then wielding the knife,
And with fine inconsistency
Dealing everyone,

Wasson too—"Bless you, boy!"

A generous piece.

"On Sunday, boys,

You must all come to my house."

"Wheel-chairs?"

"Sure—wheel-chair brigade!"

The Pie Lady's house—

God save you and the devil take you,

What a house it is!

What does the red parlour carpet care for most,
Being the Pie Lady's own carpet?

Why wheels to run over it,
And hob-nails to tramp it,

And crutchès to beat it and canes
And the like.
And the piano—
’Tis fairly hoarse with the “rags”
Which the neighbor-girls play for the boys.
Miracles happen
In the Pie Lady’s house.
When the “Wearin’ of the Green,”
Or “Mrs. McCloud’s reel,”
Or “Ja-da” goes,
Even bandaged toes will tap,
Youth must dance if only on one foot.

And it’s such a glad higgie-pigglety
Of jests and laughs,
Of clicking knives and forks.
If an arm’s out o’ commission,
Who cuts the meat?
If somebody looks too sad,
Who knows how to woo back the smile?
And who better than the postman
Knows the letters that come
From Everywhere
Her boys have gone.

“Tis from McHugh—poor boy!”
She is showing Mrs. McGilvery

On the side,

“His last letter—

I sent him a box of things, Mrs. McGilvery,

But he never got them.

This is the notice from the paper,

Requiem Mass and all—in his home town.

See what he says—poor boy.

‘I often think of you, Mother,

How kind you was to me,

At the Hospital and at your house,

And the good eats.

I’m feelin’ fine here—they’ve good nurses,

And the doctor says the next slashing

Will fix me up—but I miss the boys

And you—

So say a little prayer for me

Now and then.

We can do that for each other,

And that’s a whole lot—’

Yes, Mrs. McGilvery, ’tis his last letter,

God rest his soul—

Have some more of the chicken, Tony!

What’s gone with your appetite—you rogue?

And you, John—?”

Many a lady comes visiting the Hospital,
Fairer ladies,
More worldly-wise maybe,
More learned in the way of words,
But the Pie Lady—
She's for now,
When we need her so,
And for memory.

She is like mothers are,
And mothers are like God,
And God is Love.

"EVERY DOG HAS HIS DAY"

BUM" may sound uncomplimentary,
So do such terms as "Gold-bricker"
And "Cripple,"
Flung in bluff affection
From buddy to buddy.
At any rate "Bum" was the little mongrel's name,
And it was given to him
By Lou Slansky,
The afternoon his pal, George Buck,
Had the operation.

Lou had wheeled himself out on the lawn,
Under the pines,
Where the hot sun gave way to the wind.
He was puffing his pipe glumly,
Giving no quarter to the girls,
Who in passing,
Were used to the bantering words
Of the two cronies.
Thinking only of the smothering ether,
And the pain—

Wishing he might suffer it,
Instead of his friend.

Then the dog came by,
Crouched on his hunkers,
Lifted an interested ear,
Hung out the red flag of his panting tongue,
Raised his brown eyes
Questioningly,
As to say:
"What's the row, old man,
Anything I can help?"
And waited—

"Come here, you Bum!"

Bewildered by the conflict of tone and word,
Bum lingered,
Thumping the grass with a hopeful tail.
Then approaching cautiously,
Within the reach of the hand,
Which did not strike
But patted,
Bum reared on his hind legs,
His paws resting on the blanketed lap.

"You old Bum—you mangy old Roustabout!"

The cold wet nose touched the caressing hand.

"Who's your master?"

The red tongue gives the hand

An appreciative slither.

"Old Calico-coat,

Who gave you the black eye?"

Bum panted delightedly.

Here was friendship at last.

With one swift leap

He was on the soldier's knees,

Lapping at his face

With little excited yelps.

"Down!"

He crouched obediently

At the boy's feet,

His nose to the ground, apologetically

Between his paws.

"Go get it, Bum!"

He was not angry then?

Bum ran after the thrown cane,

Bringing it back triumphantly

Again and again.

The other soldiers, lying about under the trees,
Grew interested.

One of them tossed him a ball

"What a jolly lot they are,"

Bum thought—"they would be good masters,
I'll adopt them."

So the afternoon passed

Too swiftly—

Bum was snoozing by his new-found friend,

When the strange chair on wheels

Began to move.

He pricked up his ears.

A moving chair—how odd.

He rose, stretched, yawned,

Shook himself,

And trotted after.

At the door of the Hospital,

Two great fellows in khaki,

With pistols at their sides,

Took the chair in hand,

To wheel it up the incline to the entrance.

Bum's suspicions were aroused.

He growled ominously,

Showed his white teeth:

"Youck-youck—youck-youck!"

He barked threateningly
There was laughing then,
Even First-Friend joined,
Bum wondered why,
Then the wide screen doors opened,
The chair was wheeled through,
The doors shut with a bang,
And he was outside.

He whimpered there,
Scratched at the wire netting,
Whined,
Recalled all the wheedling words dogs know,
But no one came.
And at last one of the Awful Two with pistols,
Drove him away.
"Get out—you Bum!" he said.

Bum skulked down the steps,
And under a green bush
By the door.
People were coming and going,
Dusk was making everything dim.

At last a bevy of nurses came,
Pretty ladies in white,

Their blue cloaks thrown back,
The scarlet showing.
They stopped to talk,
The door half open.

Swift as the wind
Bum sped,
Over the gravel drive,
Up the steps,
Through the doorway,
Across the great lobby,
His nose to the ground.
"Aha—now I'll find him,"
He thought,
"Bum he called me—but he made it a good name.
Here Master went—down this hall,
Around this turn—
What funny red lights people need
To show them the way.
I can find my way in the dark.
Here—here he is—
Ah, but the door is closed, always doors.
Youck—youck!"

Voices sounding, the knob turns.
Bum bounds in,

His tail wiggling ecstatically.

"Youck-youck—youck-youck!"

Sure enough—First-Friend was there,

And in the bed,

Another friend—very white,

But smiling too.

"I said they were a jolly lot,"

Bum thought.

"This is Bum—he found me, see

When you go out again,

We'll have him—

Let's keep him here till then."

And so Bum came to be

An inmate of the Hospital.

And as he goes from ward to ward,

Lapping shared milk,

Gobbling a bit of meat, dropped from a tray,

Scampering for things thrown from beds,

Or wig-wagging to the village

Behind wheeled chairs,

He often says to himself

Thankfully:

"Every dog has his Day,

And this is mine—"

"ALL IN THE BLUE UNCLOUDED WEATHER"

MORNING is calling,
And May.
From the windows of the corridor,
Beyond the big, dim ward,
The wind surges in,
Cool and sweet.

Call for "chow" is sounding,
And from the upper floors of the Hospital
The soldiers come pouring down
Like a brown river,
Each ward yielding its turbulent tributary,
Till all sweep into the sea of youth
In the great lobby below.

Though the sun peeps over the tree-tops,
Many of the boys in Ward D still sleep.
Even the call of a May morning fails,
After nights of wakefulness and pain,
And deep in slumber they lie,
Pathetic, distorted shapes
Under the white covers.

Some sit up tousled, yawning,
Or lean languidly,
Puffing a cigarette.
Manning is pummeling Schure,
His devoted slave
With a pillow,
Despite the mumbled protests:
"Snap out of it, you boob!
Can't you let a man sleep?
I'll bat you in the eye next."

The day nurses,
Like little white birds,
Flit from bed to bed,
With twitterings of cheer.

From the ward kitchen comes the clatter of dishes,
The unalluring smell of cooking things.
At home, you would be out long ago,
Chopping wood,
Or milking the cows,
Or working in the garden,
Or off with your dog.
Appetite—?
Just let mother call:
"Come boys—breakfast's ready!"

Oh, well, what's the use,
Better days are coming—
There'll be other Mays.

The neighborly beds of Porrier and Holt are empty.
The two buddies eat in the mess-hall now.
Their wounds progress so well
That Porrier scarcely limps,
And hopes some fine day soon
To be tossing his cane to the winds.
Holt's arm still rests in the sling,
But the everlasting throbbing has stopped.
Every two hours the lads must be on hand,
That the healing "Daken" be pumped into the wounds.

They come from mess now,
Hurry to their beds,
Snatch the overseas caps
From the bags there,
And hurry out,
Down the long hall to the side door,
Whose steps plunge into the midst of the pines,
Tremulous now in the wind.
Beyond—the white sandy road
Leads—who-knows-where.

Frail lacy things of white and pink and gold
In quivering ranks,
Are lifting by the way.
Wild plum-trees are in bloom.
The maple leaves are changing bronze to green.
The dandelions now are balls of flimsy down,
Strawberries blossom in the grass.
Brown robin-haunted fields on either side,
Deep-furrowed, wait the grain.
There are lush meadows where the cattle feed.
Tiny hidden creatures tell their joy
In every hedge-row,
Sudden wings disturb the brambles,
And every windy tree-top cloisters song.

They travel far without a word.
Holt says at last:
"Up home—up York State,
I know every foot of the woods.
Out with my gun early and late.
Woodchucks—got six one morning.
One fought with my dog—gee, I laughed.
The two rollin' over and over down the hill.
Outdoors for me—
When I get S.C.D.,
Goin' to take a course at Cornell,

Graftin' and prunin' trees.
Do that summers,
Trap in the winter.
Look at 'im, will you,
Sassy as you please—"

A grey squirrel whisks along the grey fence,
Up an oak, to a road-arching bough.
Over their heads he sits, munching a nut,
Little nose puckering,
Bushy, over-topping tail twitching.

"Sure he's sassy—he's a right to be.
He's in his own home-town.
When I get back to Van Buren,
On the St. John's River,
Up in my country, up in the lumber country,
I'll be sassy too—"

A rattling farm-wagon overtakes them.
The old man offers a ride to the next lane.
"Near two miles—better climb up."
He is kindly, the old man,
But shows symptoms of the dreaded curiosity.
He begins his questionnaire
Before they can answer.

"Was you in France?
Was you wounded?
Is that why you limp?
Did you get hit in the arm?
How many Huns did you kill?"
So the soldiers thank him,
Saying they are out for a bit of a walk.
Disappointed the old man clucks to his horses,
Bids the two good-day,
And drives on.

"Sure is some swell day," Holt says.
"I'll say so!"
Then silence—

"Ho, what's this?" Porrier calls, "Cross-roads!
What does that old tipsy sign-post say?
Seven miles to—for the love of Pete!
Have we walked that far!
It's ten-thirty too, time for 'Dakens.' "

"To hell with 'Dakens'!
It says two miles to Huntingdale.
Huntingdale for mine—we can get the train back."

On again—
Past little houses, built more closely now,

Homes half hid in shrubbery,
Lilacs purple and white,
Honeysuckle,
Wistaria,
On, on—under the blue.

Boys, back there in the big dim ward,
Some day you too may take the high-road,
Under the sky,
Some day—please God.

"Ah, there it is—there is Huntingdale,
At the foot of the slope.
A woodsy little town.
How straight and thin and white the spire lifts.
Yonder is a flag floating above the trees.
It must be on the village green,
No—it's in the school-yard.
School's out—it's noon.
See the little kids,
Wish we were kids again—look at 'em,
Look at 'em run!"

Little girls,
Skipping rope or going hippity-hop,
All fluttery petticoats,

And butterfly bows,
And flying pigtails.
Little boys,
Fisty-cuffing,
Pushing,
Shouting,
They come—

Up the hill toward the travelers,
Climbs a diminutive couple,
The boy carrying the books of his wee lady.
A taunting chorus follows them:
"Susie's got a beau,
Susie's got a beau,
Hi-o-tarry-o,
Susie's got a beau."

Trying to appear unconscious of their tormentors,
Over-conscious of each other,
They do not see the soldiers,
Till Porrier's great voice booms over them:
"Don't mind 'em—what do they know!"

"We don't mind 'em thankth," Susie lisps at last.
"I'd lick 'em if dey wuzn't so many,"

Pouts the boy.

"Are you tholdierth from Franth?"

"Yes," say Porrier,

"And if your teacher is a very pretty one,

We'll come to the school to make a speech

This afternoon,

And tell you all about the war."

"She ith pretty—ain't she, Thammy?"

Sammy agreed—"And she's nineteen just,

Miss Ketcham, her name is."

"Tell her we'll be there."

"Croth your heart—"

"Cross my heart and die!"

As the children scampered away to tell,

Holt turned to his friend.

"Where do you get that stuff?

It'll get you in bad some o' these days,

I'll bet—"

Then they both laughed

And forgot all about it,

For they saw ahead, hanging from an elm-branch,

A sign that read:

"Huntingdale Inn"—

Now Hospital fare is not always the best,
And walks along cool May-roads,
With youth
And merry hearts,
Conspire to make zest for "chow" keen.
So the meal in the Huntingdale Inn
Was a good one.
The smoke under the trees afterwards was good,
The world was good.
The train to the Hospital town,
Not due until three-ten,
There would be an hour and more to spare.
The buddies strolled out serenely,
Down one street, up another,
Suddenly they found themselves before the school,
Under the blowing flag.

Then the doors burst open
And the irrepressible, shrill-voiced horde
Was upon them.
Led by Susie's beau they charged,
A wild helter-skelter
Of arms and legs,
Of chattering, rosy-cheeked eagerness.
And in the doorway stood Miss Ketcham,
Slim, expectant,

Unbelievably pretty,
And nineteen—

Dim memories of the problem
Of immovable bodies meeting irresistible forces
Came to Porrier.
Holt, speechless with laughter,
Allowed himself to be swept step by step
With his friend,
To the very door of the school-house,
Where Miss Ketcham
Welcomed the rather non-plussed jester,
Telling him how his speech
Would be appreciated.
She took them in,
Offering two chairs facing the school,
By the fusty little organ.

When at last recess was over,
And the bell called all the scalawags
To their seats,
Miss Ketcham told the children
That this young soldier,
Just home from France, would address them.
Susie's beau started hand-clapping,
Which resulted in such whistling,

Tapping of rulers,
And stamping of feet,
That the pretty teacher had to look quite severe.

Then Porrier suggested that as a beginning,
The Star-Spangled Banner be sung.
Miss Ketcham apologized for the organ's wheeziness,
And begged the speaker to start the tune,
Which he did,
Though Susie in her eagerness piped:
"O, thay can you theeeee—"
Before the others reached their feet.
Then they began together
And sang.

They were so young, that little company,
Not in the twenties even.
Not Miss Ketcham,
Not Porrier nor Holt.
And the scholars—bless them,
No one had even reached the teens,
Though Susie's beau felt old,
Wise and very old,
And the Star-Spangled Banner itself
Was rippling over them.
When the song was done,

And everything was very still for a minute,
They could hear it—
They heard the song-sparrows too,
And the bees booming by,
And they were all ears
As little pitchers should be,
All ears and eyes.

How great Porrier seemed to them,
So strong and tall and dark,
In khaki too.
He told them many things they liked to hear
About the poor little orphan children,
The boys saw at Brest when they landed.
Of Christmas over there,
When the soldiers set up trees for the kiddies,
And gave them what little they had.
How many of the boys would never come back,
Because they had given their lives
That all little children might be happy.

He might have said much more,
So attentive was the audience,
Had not Holt lifted a warning wrist.
Three o'clock—at three-ten the train.
Then Miss Ketcham thanked her guests,

And said that the children
Would never forget their visit,
And ended by dismissing the school for the day.
Even then the long hoarse whistle sounded,
And in a wild flurry of bows
And flying pigtails,
Of tossed caps
And "good-by's" and "come-agains,"
Porrier and Holt mounted the steps,

As the train slowly climbed the hill,
They saw again above the trees,
Against the cloudless sky,
The slim white spire
And the flag—

BUDDIES

IT was Old Man Gailey,
Whose blessed mission it is
To teach the playing of ukeleles
And guitars and such,
At the Hospital,
Who dubbed the two boys
“David and Jonathan.”

They had been transferred together
From hospital to hospital “over there,”
Had come back to the U.S.A. on the same transport,
On the same train from Newport News,
And into our great pine-shadowed home
Don was carried on a stretcher,
Lannigan trudging after,
Weighed down by the numerous bags,
Flowered and otherwise,
Which held the small possessions
Of both.

They reached the Hospital
Just before mess,

When the great lobby is filled with a host,
High-hearted,
Hungry,
Waiting for the call of the bugle.
A silent,
Gently curious host,
As the clanging ambulance
Brought the wan company of their fellows,
Who like themselves have known the deeps,
Back to the home-land,
But yet so far from home.

The three rather dim rooms of Ward D
Open on to the half-round sun-parlour,
Where portly guests used to disport themselves
Before the hotel became a hospital.
There are two long rows of beds out there,
The rear ones—iron four-posters,
With slings and pulleys and weights
For splinted arms and legs.
By the windows there are small looms,
And little ladies,
(Called affectionately by the boys,
On account of their gentleness
And their azure dress,
'The Blue Devils')

Teach weaving,
And the making of many unknown things.
Glittering necklaces of beads
Grow under those big patient fingers.
Old canteens are etched with designs
That have a wonderful frosty-silver look.
Coloured threads become
Fringy mats,
To send, half apologetically,
To someone you love—back home.
There are round tables there,
Where the knights may amuse themselves
With cards and what-not.

There is a canary called 'Micky,'
Tended unfailingly by Private Kahl,
One of the first Americans
Wounded in the war.
In a pebbly-bottomed, green-watered aquarium,
Golden namesakes of Charlie Chaplin,
Annette Kellerman and Jonah,
Flirt their filmy tails,
As with cold wide eyes
And gaping jaws,
They ceaselessly circumnavigate
Their mimic world.

And folks—

What agreeable folks are there.

There is the ward-man, Slim,
Gangling, slow-witted, gentle old Slim,
From the Tennessee Mountains.
He “never did get across,
Reckon t’wan’t to be that way.”

It’s—“Hey, Slim, get me a pack o’ Camels!”
“Is the evening paper in yet, Slim?”
“Ho, Slim—help me turn over.”
“Loosen that clamp on my leg, will you, Slim?”
Morning to night it is so.
And that the boys like him is pay enough.
“Good old Scout—Slim!” they say,
“You got to hand it to ’im,
Nothin’ on his *shoulders*, but—”

And those sisters of mercy—the nurses,
Whose spirits seem to soar
On unwearable wings.

And the sure, bluff, kindly surgeon,
With his sly dry jokes.
He has a little family in the village.

The boys who are able to go "down-town"
Tell of seeing "Cap" with his wife
And his three little rosy boys,
Out for a walk under the trees.
The soldiers in "Cap's Ward"
Sort of feel that they own him,
Family and all.
And "Cap" was once heard to say,
Though he is chary of words,
"The longer I'm with the overseas boys
The more wonderful they seem,
And the more I love them."

And at the least he has fifty of them.

Fifty jesting, singing, rollicking lads,
Fifty laughers at suffering,
Except the suffering of others.
Lads from your town and my town,
And everybody's town

So Ward D of the three din rooms
And the wide porch,
Is anything but a sombre place.
And into Ward D Don was carried,
And laid on his bed,

As smiling as a boy just out of school,
In spite of the twisted in-drawn hands and feet.
And Lannigan—
“The luck’s still with us!” says Don,
Lannigan in the bed beside him.

Old Man Gailey came strolling through,
From giving a lesson on the mandolin
To someone on the porch,
And hailed the two blithely,
As is his way.
Lannigan having just doubled the pillow
To the right height
Under his pal’s head,
And pushed a cigarette between the willing lips,
Was touching a match to it.

“Pretty soft—eh?” he queried,
Turning to Old Man Gailey,
“Just lays there—darned old gold-bricker,
Lets me wait on him—
I got his number though,
He can’t put it over on me much longer!”

Then someone called Lannigan,
And Old Man Gailey was left alone

With Private Don.

Across the ward, the surgeon was dressing a wound.

The soldier bearing the pain

In stoical, grim-lipped silence.

"Great—ain't it?" Don said smiling,

"The way they take things."

"Yes," said the old man,

"It's great they way *they* take things,

Great lads *they* are!"

"Oh, but I wasn't always happy like—like I am.

When this first come on me,

And I see my arms and legs

Like old twisted roots of a tree,

D'ye know, I began to yell—yes sir,

Just yelled—yelled—yelled,

Day and night for three weeks 'most.

I knew what I was doin'—I wasn't 'nutty,'

But one day I hears the doctors talkin'.

One of them says—'Don had better be dead.

We'll have to transfer him

To the psycho'—whatever it is,

You know—the 'nut-ward.'

And I says to myself—'Go to it!'

I didn't give a damn.

Just then they fetched a guy in,
Like him across there now,
Goin' through hell he was,
Bein' dressed—not a yelp out of 'im,
An' blind too at that—
An' by God, I seen my luck then,
An' I cut the loud stuff,
Ain't done it since,
Got to grit me teeth now and then,
But I'm comin' 'round—
Got the best old buddy livin',
Good place to stay—plenty to smoke.
I sure am a lucky dog, why—”

Just then Lannigan came back,
Carrying with the mock solemnity
Of a high-class waiter,
The little four-legged tray
With Don's mess.

“Still four-flushin'—eh?
You want to watch this guy, sir,
He's got a good line,
But keep your lamps lit,
Ye see I'm wise to him—
Can't bunk with a feller,

As long as I have with him
Without gettin' his number!"

All the while cutting the meat,
Mashing the soggy potato,
Stirring the coffee,
Feeding him as a mother-robin her young.

"He'd even like me to chew it for 'im,
Blame old slacker—just wait,
My innings is comin'—!"

Old Man Gailey laughed
Till his face was perilously red.
He laughed till he almost—
But he wouldn't do that, of course,
But he did say:
"I see I've got to rename the two of you.
What d'ye s'pose the names 'll be?
You—you'll be David,—you, Jonathan,
David and Jonathan—"
And Old Man Gailey waddled off,
Strumming a gay little tune on his ukelele,
As he went.

Strange terrible things of iron
Were fastened to Don's hands and to his feet

To force them straight,
Things which forbade sleep,
And made him think often of the three weeks
When he "yelled and yelled"—
But he only gritted his teeth,
And smiled and smoked,
And watched the other fellows,
Those funny, rowdy other fellows,
And waited—
Till by and by the clamps began to help,
He could sit in a chair among pillows.

Lannigan wheeled him out,
First to the lobby,
Then to the lawn,
Then to the pine-grove—the village,
And to the lake beyond the town.
There Lannigan, with his cheery loud words,
The ready laugh, the twinkling eyes,
The rakish devil-may-care of him;
And Don with his pathetic bravery,
And his silent adoration of his friend,
Became great favorites
With the winter people,
And the villagers too.

And Lannigan's songs,
The wild heel-and-toe-and-away-we-go
Of his jigging, his clogging,
Made many a wise old one say:
"Much need you have of the Hospital,
A young husky like you!"

Even Old Man Gailey laughed,
When one day Lannigan said:
"About day after tomorrow I get mine."
"Go tell that to the—" Gailey began.
"No kiddin'—I get mine next.
We got old Don so's he can stump around a bit,
Can't work his shell-game no more—
Yeah, they got to cut out a forget-me-not,
Jerry lodged in me left lung.
Bullet—yeah,
Oh, sure,
Sure I'll come out of it all right.
That's why they been holdin' me here
In this ward—"

Out on the porch someone was calling:
"Ho—Lannigan!"
Another voice and another.
NcNulty was scraping the fiddle.

"Twas an Irish jig,
Lannigan was there in a twinkling.
"Ho, ho—go it Lannigan!"

Ho for the clapping hands of them,
The timing toes—the whirl of the dancer,
The back-tossing of his hair,
The red of his cheeks,
The glint of his white teeth,
The limber joints,
The nimble wits,
Ho, ho—the joy of it!
Everybody who could, sitting up in bed,
Everybody who couldn't, laughing.
Everybody filled with good will
For everybody else.
And these are they who for our sakes
Suffered and—

Two days afterwards,
Old Man Gailey, ukelele under arm,
Was making his way down the corridor,
Which passes Ward D,
When he saw the ominous white wagon,
Being trundled toward him.
The man who pushed it wore a white gown,

A white cloth bound about his head.
On the cart, above the white sheet,
He recognized Lannigan's dark tousled head.

The boy winked,
Gailey winked back, and said: "Good luck, son,"
Though his heart was very sad.
"Thanks, dad—I'm gettin' a free ride.
If you're lookin' for Don,
You'll find him on the porch—"

Old Man Gailey turned into Ward D,
Through the dim room to the porch.
Don was not there.
Some of the boys had seen him,
Hobbling with his canes through the pines,
Just before they took Lan to the operating-room.

A cold fine mist was blowing against the windows,
The grey boughs of the pines were shaking
As though in fear.
Gailey put on his coat and hat,
And followed where they said the lad had gone.
He did not find him,
But the old man walked on and on.
Grey days always held music for him,

But this one—the shuddering trees,
The uneasy whisperings of the wind,
The driven surface of the lake,
Were without power to move him.
Two lads—one even now under the knife,
One hobbling away alone.
Two lads—two hundred thousand lads like them,
“Broken for us”—the words sang themselves,
Over and over—“Bodies broken for us.”

It was evening when the old man
Came back to the Hospital.
Neither of the boys were in their places.
“The operation was a very serious one,”
The nurse said,
“They have taken him to a room in Ward B.”

A group of soldiers stood
In the corridor of Ward B,
In the dim red glow of the high lights.
Occasionally they spoke in half whispers.
A doctor came out of room 78,
A priest followed.
Sick at heart the old man waited.
Beyond the hall window,
The pines huddled black

Against the lowering sky.
The cool mist was about him,
And the winds,
Ominously murmuring.

At last he turned down toward room 78.
The passage was deserted now.
Noiselessly he turned the knob.
Under the shaded light
Lannigan lay,
White, motionless, his eyes closed.
Close beside him his buddy sat,
One of his still distorted hands
Resting on the other's sturdy one.
From the Educational Department beyond
Came the tap-tap-tap of a typewriter.
Someone passed in the hall.
Still no motion from the bed,
Could he be—

Old Man Gailey's heart seemed to stop beating
At the sudden fear.
He took a step forward.
Don heard and turned—saw the grief.
“No, no—nothin' like that,” he whispered,
“He ain't out o' the ether yet—that's all.”

Suddenly, blinkingly, Lannigan's eyes opened,
"Hello, dad—" he yawned, "Old Sport—!"
Then the eyes flickered shut again.
"Say, dad—" mumblingly,
"Know what you can do for me—?
Fetch me a—a pretty girl—to talk to."
Off again into deep moveless sleep.

The two laughed in spite of themselves.
"How's that for game?"
Don asked proudly.

In Old Man Gailey's mind ancient words
Were repeating themselves,
As words had a way of doing with him:
*"And the soul of Jonathan was knit with
The soul of David—"*

"How's my old buddy for game—eh?"
Don repeated,
Awkwardly fixing the shade on the light.
And Old Man Gailey answered in the vernacular
Which he loved:

"Game—that buddy of yours,
Game—
I'll say so!"

THE SHADOW OF THE CLOUD

VAN BALDERDECK stepped from the train,
As it paused for breath
In its laboured ascent of the mountain.
The village had not changed.
Several old men smoked their pipes
Meditatively,
Their chairs cocked against the shady side
Of the Kaaterskill Inn.

Old Mrs. Herren leaned inquisitively
From her door,
Her hands folded comfortably
Across her ample front.
The window of her store, four-paned,
With its hodge-podge of this and that,
Might have been untouched since the day he left.
She lumbered down her steps,
Hands outstretched to meet him:
“If it ain’t Van Balderdeck back home again!
We heard you was at the hospital,
But how well you look—how’s France?”

The three old men, roused now from their revery,
Came toddling over.
Veterans of the Civil War.
Van remembered them—on Decoration Days,
Brave in their blue,
Stepping it marshally up the steep road
To the burying-ground,
Where most of their comrades were sleeping now.
How their wrinkled faces lighted,
Their toothless jaws wagging.
“Proud to shake your hand, boy,
The first of our *own* to get back.”
Old Man Hals: “You’ve growed—ain’t ye?”
Old Man Ellis: “Dead spit o’ your father!”
Old Man Bleeker: “You know we soldiered with
him.”
Chorus of old men pipingly:
“And a fine soldier he was too.”

Old Mrs. Herren, turning away in answer to a voice
From somewhere in the narrow deep of her store,
Called back over her fat shoulder:
“Your ma was in today—
Oh, she’s fine—You’re surprisin’ her, ain’t you?
Better watch—might be too much for her.”
“It’s the other that kills,

I say—not joy.”

“You’re right, boy—right you are.”

The old men cackled,

Toddling back to their chairs

In the shade.

Van trudged on,

Up the road that like a red scar

Glares through the torn green garments of the hills.

Before him the upland pastures lay,

Wild in their gipsy glory.

Buttercup and daisy,

Meadow-rue and clover,

Tall swaying grasses,

And swift-winged glinting creatures of the air.

Down, down among their rocky caverns,

Swift waters glanced and foamed,

Sweet, wild waters eager for the sea.

Now the path turned,

And between the cloud-capped chasm

Of the parted hills,

The misty valley of the Hudson lay,

Dim as a dream;

And like a dream, ineffable, fantastic,

Filling the dreamer with ecstasy,

Only to make more rude the awakening.
Over the sunlit stretches of valley and of hills
Dark shadows fell.

Van never pausing, for home lay ahead,
And the loaded bags which swung from his shoulders,
Big with his precious belongings,
Little nothings—but much to him—
Were heavy—
(He had taken off his blouse,
Opened the khaki shirt
That the wind which was blowing his hair
About the tipped cap, might reach his throat)—
Never pausing in his sturdy climb,
Lifted his eyes to the sky,
Where masses of white cloud swept across the sun.
Clouds, unreal things—passing vagrants,
They made the darkness on the sunlit hills.
Clouds—

Had they known—the village people
About the hospital days?
Had they guessed what sort of a hospital it was?
Did they know the name, that brutal name?
The boys in that ward used the name themselves,
Laughingly, to hide the hurt of it.

They called it the—
Joked about it being a place for squirrels.
Did they know—Mrs. Herren,
And the three old men—and the others,
The children and the girls?
Did mother know—where he had been?

The beauty of the still high places was lost.
He was back again with Tom—
Poor Tom, standing silent all day,
Gazing into vacancy.
And Jo, who mumbled always about bees,
Always ducking his head for fear of singing bees
Flying over—
And the other fellow, who flew into sudden frenzies,
Trying to throttle, to strangle—
Ah—he shuddered at the memory.

He remembered the magazine a visitor gave him.
In it was a story of a soldier
Who imagined blindness.
Imagined—

There was a doctor in the story,
Who said that shell-shocked people are yellow,
That they are cowards,

Slackers—

How many people had read the story?

Hundreds of thousands, no doubt.

If any one of them, after reading that story,

Which had the air of truth,

Should meet one of the boys who had been—

They would turn away in scorn.

Hot waves of mortification, of dread swept over him.

He sank to a friendly rock by the way,

Swinging the heavy bags from his shoulder.

Had the man who wrote that story

Been through the mill?

Had he seen men die—?

Had he, like little Jo back in the ward there,

Yes, that's what they call it—the "nut ward,"

Had he run through the night with a message?

Had he been shot through the hand,

And after that staggered on

Three kilometers—and more,

And delivered the orders blood-drenched?

Poor eighteen-year-old Jo,

Who mumbled always about bees.

The man who wrote the story—

Where was he—that night?

“And me—”

Van reached tremblingly for the blouse,

Took from the pocket a worn book,

Opened the folded paper.

“Even me—with this—”

“Headquarters Ninth Infantry Brigade,

A.P.O. 745, American E.F.,

31 December 1918,

The following officers and enlisted men

Are cited in orders for distinguished service in action.

Private Van Balderdeck (237893) E Company,

Sixtieth Infantry,

Date September 15th, 1918.

Place Bois de Bon Vaux.

Private Balderdeck rendered invaluable service

As a runner for his platoon.

He never hesitated to undertake any mission,

Even under heavy artillery and gas bombardment.

He was finally wounded in the performance of his
duty.

His cheerful willingness

And meritorious conduct,

Served as an example and inspiration

To his comrades—”

He folded the paper and put it back in the pocket,
Took up the bags and started on, comforted.

All the West was gleaming,
The mountains brimming with amber light,
The far hills faint lavender,
Touched with gold.
And home so near—how could he have stopped by the
way?
Those memories—let them begone.

Nearer, nearer—just beyond the next turn,
Now through the hemlocks,
The grey of the roof,
The smell of smoke, rising blue and straight,
Above the trees—
There is a great cackling of hens,
Mother must be feeding them.
Ah, there she is—dear old mother,
Blue calico dress,
Blue calico with the tiny white stars.
Her wheat-filled apron caught up in her hand,
With the other she is sowing the grain broadcast
To the squawking, squabbling brood.
There are the coops with the ruffle-feathered old hens,
And the yellow cheeping balls of down.

There is the barn, its great doors wide,
Hay bulging from the mows.
“Mother—mother—”

Oh, the joy of that evening.
Mother’s cooking, how good it was,
And her talk—and her face.
And after supper they must wander together
All about the place.
To the barn to see Doll and Fan,
To the pens where the grunting pigs
Lifted their wicked little eyes
Expecting filled troughs,
And turned again to their wallows,
Disgusted with empty-handed guests.
To the garden—Mother’s pride,
With its crisp green rows,
And flowery borders—

And then in the twilight on the wide porch,
That overlooked the valley,
So many things to say.
And the moon rose—
And among the cool leaves,
The veeries and the thrushes sang.
They must have known,

And could not go to sleep
And end the song.
And a laughing owl somewhere out there called:
"Who-who—who-who."
With a low, chuckling, half-whispered word,
Which might have been the answer
Following.

Then the lamp was lit,
The healed wound must be shown,
Just to show that it is healed.
"And you really feel like yourself, son?"
"Sure, mother—sure I do."
"There's something in your eyes,
Something kindo' far off—
But if you feel all right—that's all,
If you feel all right—"
And the bed—his own good bed,
In the room that looked down the steep,
Looked right down into the heart of the leaves.
And she must tuck him in.
"The little prayer—the one you used to say,
Do you remember it?"
"I said it every night—'over there,'
I liked to make believe that I was home
With you—"

So he said it again,
And she kissed him goodnight,
And came later to see whether he wanted anything;
But he said there was nothing now *to* want,
And the little house was very still.

The old clock chimed midnight.
All was well—
Chimed one.
Van awoke with a cry.
He was strangling,
He clutched at his throat.
How deathly still the night was.
Huge black-cloaked monsters were crouching all
about,
The white, dead face of the moon looked down,
Between wide-flung wings of cloud.
White—unearthly bits of white,
Like torn flesh, lay scattered on the floor.
They seemed to tremble.

Where was he?—Oh, yes, yes, of course.
Billeted in the loft in Bois de Bon Vaux.
But everything was so still.
No velvet, thudding, ominous sounds
Through the dark—

No red shrieking things in the sky.
All so still.

Except down below—far, far below,
A moaning like wind through leaves,
But all the leaves were still.
Water, the water falling from the cliff,
The old sound he heard as a child,
But still it is thousands of miles from home.
Hark—out there someone calls his name,
Then all is still again,
All but the moaning water,
Far, far below—

Where can he be?—yonder is a door,
But there are the dark, crouching things.
Trees they seem—they seem trees,
But who knows what they may be.
He must escape.
Stealthily he unlatches the door.
Someone is breathing heavily in the dark,
Ah, God, it might be—it might be a—
The torn white bits of flesh over the floor—
Another door, how familiar it looks,
And by it a mirror—he glimpses himself,
Like himself—but no.

Suddenly again the voice calling.
He tears the door open,
Runs shrieking through the night,
All along the shadow-flecked mountain-road.
White flesh—torn flesh,
And the crouching things that seem like trees,
And that awful face overhead,
White and dead—looking down
Between fleecy, wide-spread wings.

Something is following him,
Dark, flitting—
It is the ghost of that grey man with the blond hair.
No—ah, God—it is he, himself,
Van Balderdeck—that flitting thing.
The other is the grey man.
Again his name, someone calling his name.
How did *it* know—whatever it was?
Was it the white dead thing with the spread wings?
Why must he follow—he, the shadow?
Let the fluttering grey thing go on,
The shadow would stop—

Now the path winds up, up,
Narrower,
The moaning waters are nearer.

The grey man must be gripping the shadow.

Oh, why must the shadow follow?

There, there—ah, God,

The cliff—

And the foaming water,

White as the dead floating thing above.

Ah, the quiet waters far below,

The shadow—if it could only wrest free

“Van Balderdeck—

Van—Van—Van—”

The pursuing voice sounds nearer.

Suddenly the grey man

Reaches the slippery rock,

His feet are in the rushing water.

The grey man—ah, and the shadow too.

On the jutting rock,

Between the sky and the black pit,

Where the waters rest.

The grey man throws up his arms:

“Kamerad—Kamerad!” he yells,

And leaps—

Down, down—the body crashing against trees.

The shadow is free—Van Balderdeck is free.

Ah, thank God—

He falls back quivering on his pillow.
His mother is kneeling by him,
Shaking him, calling:
“Van—dear son—
You have been dreaming,
Tell me—what was it—dear?”

She is wiping the cold sweat from his forehead.
He reaches his trembling hands toward her.
“Where am I—am I a coward?
Am I yellow—?
The doctor in the story said—”

“Oh, my dear, you’re home—you’re home.
Let me light the lamp.
See, you’re in your own room—dear,
It’s mother here.”

“Oh, now I know—I—know.
Don’t worry, mother,
It was just a shadow—just a—
Just the shadow
Of a passing cloud—”

"MEN OF GOOD WILL"

H^{O—}
Listen to them.
Ding-dong, ding-a-ling,
Ding-dong, ding-dong,
All the village bells.
The ringers, whoever they are,
Surely their very hearts are in it.
Ding-a-ling, dong-ding-dong,
All the bells everywhere.

When did ever such a fanfare
Float over the pines
To our high windows?
When did ever the sun shine so?
The air keen and clear,
Bathed yesterday in rain,
And from the floating clouds,
Bright snow-stars falling.
Every door is wide,
The latch-string of the world is out.

"Merry Christmas, merry Christmas!"

"Same to you, buddy,
And many of 'em—"

Happy boys,
Who were well enough, or lucky enough,
To get "leaves."

It was good to see them go,
Loaded down with bags and bundles,
Limping off—God bless them,
But their hearts not limping;
Leaping, dancing, singing,
Those hearts.

It was good to see them go,
Homeward-bound,
And yet, and yet—
Oh, well—hang it all,
They're puttin' up a good time
For us fellers that couldn't go,
So what the—tra-la-la-la—

Is this the Hospital,
That humdrum place of yesterday?
So woodsy now,
With green things everywhere,
As if—since we couldn't go outdoors,

Outdoors had come to us.
And at the elbow of each corridor,
A tiny, twinkling tree.
Ah, the good nurses planned it all,
Plotting o' nights,
Across the street,
In—"No Man's Land."

A twinkling tree at every turn,
In memory of a Child.
"Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas!"
Like little golden bells,
The words are chiming everywhere,
Upstairs and down,
Downstairs and up again.
"The same to you—the same to you!"

Kitchen duty!
'Tis a cinch on such a Day,
So savory the whiffs
Of stirred and basted things,
And bubbling, bouncing things
In steamy pots.
How gay the scurrying youths,
Bent backward with the weight

Of clattering loads,
Piled perilously high.

Thoughts are runaway horses
On Christmas Day,
No checks, no reins,
Home,
Overseas,
Back home again,
The others—over there,
Who long ago found peace.
You can't sit still and think,
You must get up and go,
Even if going's not so good,
On crutches,
In your chair,
Or heel and toe.
No matter—go you must.
You're not the only guy—
See what the rest are doing.

Through the halls,
Into the library, a bower today,
The wards—to hail a buddy,
Wards, where wounds must be dressed
Even on Christmas Day,

Into the cool, dim lobby,
Where before the flickering tapers,
The priest is saying Mass.
Candles, a cross—bowed heads,
You linger till the service ends.

The solemn clock,
With unchanged countenance,
Overlooking the young crusaders,
Like a ventriloquist
Calls:
"Dine—dine—dine."
As though he would repeat unendingly
That fine command,
Did not the bugle drown him out,
Did not the mess-hall doors swing wide.

There is a flutter now
Of femininity,
The village ladies,
Come to serve the "chow."
Go it, old bugler,
Outside there in the snow,
No one will murder you
For that today.

Everything a blur of khaki,
A flutter of skirts,
A hullabaloo of voices.
"Oh, lady, lady, what a spread!
Hardtack, corn-willie, beans,
Not on your life!
Turkey today, I'm tellin' you,
Turkey and all the trimmin's."
What's this?
A jolly old grey lady at the door,
With paper rainbow caps for every boy.
"Tip 'em over your ear, buddy,
Or wear 'em crisscross,
With a stray lock down,
Like Bony-parté."

The grim old mess-hall
Has grown young again,
Back in the hey-day of its tavern-time.
The mighty chandelier,
Hung with the tinkling prisms,
That used to make
The fat be-diamonded necks of dowagers
Glitter so regally,
Blazes again,
And youth triumphant blazes back.

The past—ah,
Christmas Day—
Strike up, you minstrels,
Make the ivories thrill,
Make them laugh, make them sing.
And you, with the slender bow,
Sweep the strings,
Call forth the hidden glory,
The tender, holy thoughts,
Too vague for words.
Courage and sacrifice,
And faith,
And love.

Good, good—we understand.
Now for the rattling of the drums,
Crash of the cymbals,
Blare of the horns,
Rag it—jazz it,
For that's us too.

A wide aisle between the tables,
With their smoking plenty
And hungry guests,
Leads to the stage,
Where cloggers clog,

And boxers wield the mitts,
And warblers swell their lyric throats,
On show-nights.

The platform now is mountain high,
With bumpy Christmas stockings,
Red and full.

And from behind the pines
Which flank the stage,
Wild, jingling sleigh-bells sound,
A stamping as of hoofs.

"Whoa, Prancer—whoa!"

And up pops Santa,
Roly-poly,
Cherry-nosed,
White-whiskered,
Dressed in red.

Then what a shout goes up:

"Tis Gaily—camouflaged—our troubadour!"

And "Gaily," the old-music-master, pants:

"A merry Christmas just the same,
A merry Christmas, lads!"

What bluff, hale greeting they shout back,
Men of the child-heart,
How they laugh—

And then the Blue-Birds come,
A score of them,
And each boy knows his own.
The one who taught—oh, leather-work,
Wood-carving,
Stringing beads,
Whatever craft she used
That helped the long days pass.
Louder,
Louder still,
The clapping hands,
The tapping crutches, canes.
While Santa passes stockings,
The girls are weaving in and out,
Among the chairs and tables,
With their gifts.

Then—all at once,
A sound of rushing feet,
A swirl of gauzy veils,
Of flying unbound hair,
A glint of filmy wings
And spangled skirts.
A flight of baby fairies
Whirl in and wave their wands,
Blow kisses,

Smile,
And dance off after Santa,
Old Santa, jingling gayly,
To the wards.

To every ward they go,
And every door,
Save one.

A soldier stands before it silently.
Santa goes slowly by,
With lowered head.
Some boy—"gone West"
Beyond that door—
The fairies too are hushed,
They tiptoe past,
And wonder why—

But—"he who dies on Christmas Day
Goes straight to God,"
And so,
The laughter comes again,
The little feet go dancing on.

Just at the passing of the Christmas Day,
When stars shone down

On snowy roofs,
And pines,
And shadowed lawns,
Old Santa left the hospital,
Dark now and still.
Before it passed from sight,
He turned,
His face was lifted and his hands:

"Men of Good Will,"
He whispered,
"Peace."
And then,
"Farewell—
High Company."

THE END



